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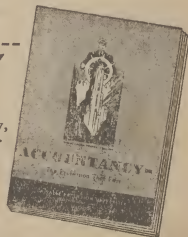
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MARVEL

STORIES

ALL STORIES BRAND NEW WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR THIS MAGAZINE

Vol. 2, No. 3

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April, 1941

★ ★ THRILLING BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL ★ ★

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by Polton Cross

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The simplest and yet the most brilliant invention of all time, the secret weapon to end all secret weapons—this was the diabolic device that Val Turner knew foreign dictators would finally use to wipe out his beloved America, this was the fiendish instrument that only a new super-science could smash!

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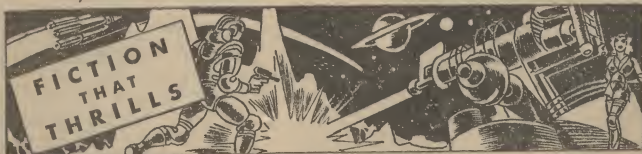
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You remember how those creatures looked, and the way they acted, the crew of the first spaceship to reach the Earth, and how you called them the Other-People . . . I wonder, though, if you guessed then that they'd turn out as they have. . . .

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Proof that the basic ultimate substance is—nothing! . . . Mechanical invisibility is coming. . . . Have you tried to kill yourself recently? . . . Do you see things as they really are?

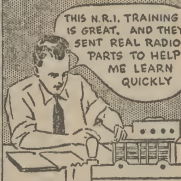


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THANKS

OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE COME AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING

TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND-- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE-- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO

GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM, UNLESS YOU DO SOME THING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE



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THE LAST SECRET WEAPON



Hellish flame split the night as masonry and steel ripped

THE shabby old man with the shuffling walk and untidy gray hair moved slowly through the corridor of marble and gilt, carrying a small valise in his hand. His tired, wrinkled eyes seemed bewildered by the infinity of elevators and moving stairways he encountered. There were

WHAT GHASTLY SECRET WEAPON MUST AMERICA FINALLY FACE, AND CAN

by POLTON CROSS

Author of "The Ray from Mars," "When the Last Star Fell," etc.

"Too barbaric for modern warfare," the diabolic device had been branded, and only Val Turner knew that here was the simplest and yet the most brilliant invention of all time, the secret weapon to end all secret weapons—the fiendish instrument that foreign dictators would finally use to wipe out his beloved America!



skywards, terrific concussions rocked the metropolis!

neon indicators everywhere, pointing the way. He looked his relief when a trim, uniformed girl took his arm and led him into the reception office.

"Dr. Mane? Of course!" She smiled and went through a black door marked "Private." In less than a moment she returned. "Go right in, doc-

SUPER-SCIENCE TRIUMPH AT LAST OVER BRUTE FORCE? — MIND-JOLTING NOVEL!

tor. Mr. Kronheim is expecting you."

"Thank you—so much."

The old man shambled in and stood blinking round an office of extraordinary size. He started nervously as the door closed behind him. He felt and looked insignificant amidst the leather chairs, desks, and cabinets.

"Hello there, Dr. Mane—come along in!" The voice that boomed across the expanse was powerful, but its cordiality sounded artificial.

Mane went onwards to the desk and grasped the fleshy paw held out to him. For a moment or two he stood studying the man whom nearly everybody knew and whom a good many feared. Rolf Kronheim was the square-headed, immaculately dressed master of the Kronheim Investment Trust—and the Trust did not limit itself to this vast Wall Street edifice either.

"Sit down, doctor. Have a cigar." Kronheim pushed the silver box across with fingers that sprouted diamonds.

"No—no, if you don't mind. I don't smoke." Mane sat down wearily to continue his survey. He was not deceived by the effusiveness. Rolf Kronheim was no philanthropist. His glacier blue eyes and merciless mouth were proof enough of that. These, added to an intelligent head from which the gray hair had nearly entirely departed all contrived to portray a man of strength and pitiless ambition.

For his part Kronheim decided his visitor was a fool, like the rest of the crackpot scientists who took up his time. But on this occasion there was just a *chance* . . . Physically weak: mentally powerful. That was Dr. Mane.

"You mentioned . . . bombs," Kronheim said suddenly.

"Yes—a new type of bomb," Mane nodded. "I've tried to interest various people, even the Government, but without success."

"Unimaginative, I suppose?"

"On the contrary. They say my invention is too barbaric to use and refer me to the Protocol of Geneva . . . But I need money, Mr. Kronheim—desperately! My daughter and I are nearly destitute."

Kronheim raised his eyebrows. "Too barbaric, eh?" he murmured. "The sentiment of our defense ministers and firms is astounding . . . Fortunately I am not a man of foolish emotions, doctor. If you have something good I can use it. If not . . . Suppose you demonstrate?"

He got to his feet and led the little scientist into the adjoining laboratory. A white clad expert with sharp gray eyes and fluffy brown hair came up expectantly.

"Dr. Mane, meet my scientific advisor Professor Standish. I rely on his judgment implicitly."

Standish shook hands and smiled unemotionally. He said briefly, "I see some hundreds of so called scientific inventions in a month, not one of which is any use. Fortunately for you there is a war on in Europe so a new type of bomb may be marketable."

"Possibly," Mane agreed quietly. "My bombs sink through the ground as a stone sinks through water. They explode where you want and when you want. That, perhaps, is marketable?"

Standish started to proclaim his disbelief in such a bomb until Kronheim cut him short.

"Take no notice of him, doctor. I guess he's soured with so many scientific disappointments . . . Now, the place is yours. Get busy."

He sat down, fat legs crossed, and pulled at his cigar. Standish stood watching with an eyebrow raised in doubt.

WITH the methodical care of a man accustomed to handling dan-

gerous articles Mane extracted a small metal ball from his valise. He looked around for a moment and finally saw an empty metal table supported on a single pillar bolted to the floor.

"Is that table pillar solid?" he inquired.

"Why . . . yes," Kronheim admitted, gazing in wonder.

"Thank you. Now watch carefully, please. This may spoil your table but it is worth it for the demonstration . . ."

Mane pulled a small pin out of the metal ball and then put the ball on the table top. Immediately the metal sphere glowed slightly and began to sink rapidly out of sight. The hole it made closed up again with a slight suck of air and the tabletop was once more smooth. Three minutes or so passed, then there was a dull report. The pillar of the table exploded with moderate violence and toppled the structure to the floor.

Kronheim jumped to his feet and strode over with Standish to where Mane stood pondering.

"What the devil did you do?" Standish demanded.

"The model bomb sank through the solid metal and exploded at the predetermined point at the base of the pillar," Mane said modestly. "Had I wished I could have sunk it right through this building."

"A self-sinking bomb?" Standish hazarded, incredulous.

"Able to sink to any required depth by simply adjusting the mechanism."

Kronheim took a deep breath and looked sharply at his advisor. Standish nodded quietly, but he looked puzzled. Had he not known the table pillar was solid steel he could have put the demonstration down to a clever conjuring trick.

"Just how do you explain it, doctor?" he asked, musing.

"It's a simple idea," Mane shrugged.

"I'll outline it to you, but of course I'm retaining the exact details until we see if we can come to terms . . . First of all, anything must move downwards towards the earth's center because of the law of gravitation. This particular idea began when I watched a stone sink in a lake one day. Suppose, I asked, something could be invented to sink through *solids*? Suppose a form of explosive able to blow up at any depth without previous drilling? I figured it would be immensely useful in laying foundations, opening up mines—"

"Quite, quite," Kronheim said impatiently. "But the *explanation*?"

"Well, I devised a small mechanism." Mane opened the hemispheres of an unused model bomb and pointed to the intricate internal workings. "You, Professor Standish, may follow the idea. Solids are composed of atoms, and atoms are miniature solar systems. In other words, if you picture them from a sideways angle, they are *flat*. But this flatness points in all directions. It is not organized. Because of this no solid can fall through another: no two solids can be said to occupy the same space at the same time . . ."

"Right so far," Standish acknowledged briefly.

"Atoms have poles," Mane resumed, "but they point in all directions. I figured that by magnetism I could make them all point in one direction! There are magnets in this bomb, as you see . . ."

Standish said slowly, "In which case you would make the atoms all flat—parallel—so that they would block only about fifteen percent of the space they occupied in the disordered form?"

"That's it," Mane nodded. "That slight resistance causes my bomb to sink slowly and not immediately. The force of gravity which of course operates under all conditions draws the

bomb downwards and the bomb's magnets straighten the atomic formations on the journey. Hence nothing can bar it and it just sinks. In short, it is a case of passing one solid through another and the moment the bomb has passed and the magnetism has gone the atoms disorder again leaving the ordinary solidity. That is why there was no bore left in the table stand where the bomb traveled: the steel atoms had reformed to cover all traces of its passage."

"Amazing . . ." Kronheim whispered. "Positively amazing!"

He seemed inordinately fascinated by the idea. Suddenly seeming to make up his mind he caught Mane by the arm.

"Come into my office, doctor. There are details to talk over. Financial details," he purred, now as friendly as a well-filled tiger.

Mane nodded his untidy gray head and scooped up his case.

"I—I thought you might like it, Mr. Kronheim—"

"Like it! Man alive, it's colossal! Sit down, won't you . . .? Now . . ." Kronheim flopped at his desk and pressed a button. Then he said, "I said you could name your own figure, doctor. Within reason, of course," he added, grinning mirthlessly.

"I—I thought, perhaps—one million dollars for exclusive rights of the Mane Bomb." Mane looked half scared at his own suggestion.

KRONHEIM did not even hesitate.

"A million it is—and you shall have your check before you leave this office . . ." He looked up as Val Turner, his young personal secretary came into the room. He looked more like a champion wrestler than a secretary. He was blond-headed, massive shouldered, hazel-eyed. There had been moments when his secretarial work had

been merged into that of bodyguard.

"Turner, make out a check for a million dollars and a contract," Kronheim said. "Usual thing—entire rights. Quick as you can and I'll sign both."

"Yes, sir." Val Turner glanced at the scientist, then went back into his own adjoining room.

"I suppose," Kronheim said, "you've got this bomb patented? The patent rights automatically become mine by our contract."

"I could never afford the patent," Mane answered quietly. "I have very little money, Mr. Kronheim. That—that won't upset things, will it?"

"On the contrary!" Kronheim gave a grim smile.

Mane began to fumble with his valise. "I have here all the details, the scientific prints, samples of the magnetic bars, everything. You can soon work out the details."

"Take them over, Standish . . ." Kronheim motioned to the scientist as he came in from the laboratory.

"You can probably see why other people thought the idea would be barbaric if used for warfare?" Mane murmured. "My bombs could be dropped anywhere and leave no trace until they blew up. I didn't invent them for that reason, though—"

Val Turner came back with papers and check in hand. In a moment Kronheim appended his signature to both and stood watching Mane's thin hand clutching the pen.

"It is not often I meet a *real* scientist, doctor," he said at last, handing over the check. "Drop in again—whenever you please. Turner, see the doctor safely out of the building."

Mane gathered up his empty case and hat. "Thank you, Mr. Kronheim, over again. You don't know what this money will mean to Gloria and me. We've been so poor and—"

"Of course—of course . . ." Kron-

heim beamed the old man and the secretary from the room, watched the door close. When he turned once more his smile had broadened into a taut line across his face.

"Well, Standish? It's genuine, of course?"

"The real thing. The simplest and yet the most brilliant invention of its kind I have ever seen. It was worth all of that million dollars."

Slowly Kronheim said, "Believe it or not, that old fool has no patent for the invention. . . ."

"No record of his ever having invented it, you mean?"

"That's just what I mean." Kronheim sat down and gazed at the material and plans Mane had left behind. "Like manna from heaven!" he breathed. "Bombs that leave no trace! The supreme means of finishing our campaign and tearing this blasted country wide open. We have the agents, from Maine to California: the European rings and societies are ready to go to work the moment I give the order . . . We can sow the country with these invisible death dealers! Thousands of them, manufactured in my own industrial works and with the infinite money supply of the Cause. We have fought hard to smash the neutrality of America, Standish—and at last an American brings the means of really doing it. I guess it's rather ironic."

"I'm afraid I don't concern myself with philosophies, Kronheim," Standish replied. "I'm a European scientist and am prepared to destroy democracy at any price. As a scientist I will work to that end: as a man I rather deplore the vicious cunning of this invention. However, we have got to see something for a million dollars. . . ."

Kronheim smiled — but it was his eyes that Standish noted most. Their blueness was icy and did not match

the lips. Standish had seen the danger signal oftentimes before.

It was close on seven in the evening and most of the Trust staff had left for home when Standish came out of his laboratory again with a satisfied smile.

"Got a moment, Kronheim?" he asked, advancing to where the big man was still working amidst a pile of memoranda.

"If it's important, yes. If not, get out."

"I sorted out this Mane invention."

"What about it?" Kronheim lay back in his chair with the desk light full on his pitiless eyes.

"Just this. We can make bombs of any size and use any sort of explosive we want. Adjustment of the mechanism times the moment of the explosion and the duration of the magnetism. That means we could send the things down five feet or five miles. No limit. There have been plenty of weapons but none like this one! I want your orders. All we want now is manufacture—so what do I do?"

KRONHEIM pondered for a moment or two, then he said, "Guess we might as well use all our key factories in north, south, east and west. Consolidated Steels can handle it. The Kronheim Trust *is* Consolidated Steels, so we're all set. You know more than I do about explosives and such-like, so work out a campaign. Pass the information on through the usual channels so the network can start operating. I'll give you further instructions later."

The scientist nodded, then he and Kronheim both looked up as the outer door opened to admit two massive individuals in soft hats and big overcoats. The taller one tossed a slip of paper on the desk.

"One million dollars, chief," he announced cryptically.

Kronheim frowned, then he grinned.

He picked the paper up and tore it slowly in pieces.

"You mean . . . Dr. Mane?" Standish asked quietly.

"Naturally." Kronheim eyed the strong arm man. "What happened to the good doctor?"

"He was run over, I guess," the man sighed. "Naturally we rushed to help the old boy—and I frisked your check from him in the process. We were too late. Hit and run driver got him, made off so fast there wasn't even time to get his number."

"In plain language, you had him murdered?" Standish snapped.

"A hit and run driver," Kronheim corrected. "Didn't you hear what Joe said? If they find the driver I'll put the clamps down and stop things being traced back here. If they don't . . . well, I guess Dr. Mane was a fool to let his invention go without a patent. Nobody can ever prove who owned it."

"Cept his daughter," Joe commented sourly.

"Of course, the daughter! What about her?"

"I dunno. I haven't seen her and—"

"Then find her, you dope!" Kronheim roared. "I want the whole Mane family tree chopped down. Not a trace must be left! Too dangerous. Do what you like, but get her. I'll see you're protected."

The men went out and Standish said slowly, "I'm not altogether sure I like this indiscriminate elimination, Kronheim. If we get across the Federal Authorities it won't be just us that will be damaged. The whole Cause will be jeopardized—"

"Oh, shut up!" Kronheim snorted. "Mane was an American—and I don't give a damn what happens to Americans. Same goes for his daughter—"

He broke off in surprise as a ray of light flooded from the wall opposite. Val Turner came quietly out of his

office, hat and coat on. He switched off the light in his sanctum and closed the door.

"What the devil do you want?" Kronheim blazed.

"Nothing, sir," Turner replied steadily. "Except to tell you that I have finished my reports. They're on my desk. Will that be all for tonight?"

Kronheim sat gazing steadily in the young man's unflinching eyes for a moment, then he slowly nodded.

"Yes . . . Yes, that's all for tonight."

"Good night, sir — Professor Standish."

Turner went out quietly then Kronheim's pale eyes flashed up to the open ventilator over Turner's office door. Standish followed his master's gaze.

"Good God, Kronheim, do you think he heard about—?"

"Possibly. I thought he'd gone home. If his door had had glass in it we'd have seen the light shining. Kronheim shrugged. "Let him try proving something and I'll smack him down so hard he'll stay put for the rest of his life. Now get out of here, Standish. I've work to finish."

CHAPTER II

THE POWER OF KRONHEIM

VAL TURNER walked through the quiet expanses of the Trust building with grim thoughts in his brain. He had heard every word of Kronheim's through his office ventilator — albeit unintentionally.

"Guess it confirms all Rita said," he muttered, letting himself down the heights in the personal elevator. Rita was his wife. "Said he was a no-good anti-democrat. Wouldn't believe her. He's a murderer, hundred percent, and

I just didn't believe it. Hell, was I dumb!"

He left the elevator and nodded good night to the watchman, passed out into the brightly lit street. It was only a short way to his apartment through the next side street. Lost in his thoughts he marched along, until when he was half way along the side street something prodded him in the back.

"Keep going — and don't turn around!"

He was surprised to hear a woman's voice—low and merciless.

"Just what's the big idea?" he asked briefly, walking mechanically.

"Shut up and let me do the talking. I'm Gloria Mane, daughter of Dr. Mane, inventor of the Mane bomb. That mean anything to you?"

Val remained silent, frowning. The girl's cutting voice went on.

"Just three hours ago I saw my dad run down—brutally slain! I was only across the road from where it happened. We'd promised to meet at the Grecian Cafe. It looked like a hit and run driver—but it wasn't. It was planned—planned by that vicious barbarian Rolf Kronheim. I warned dad what would happen if he made a deal with Kronheim, and I was right. Dead right!"

"But I didn't have anything to do with it," Val said. "Why pick on me?"

"You're connected with Kronheim, otherwise you would not be leaving the Trust Building at this hour in the evening. You're all I need. Two other guys left just before you but I couldn't tackle them. So I waited, hoping to get Kronheim himself. You came out alone, easy to handle—"

"Yeah? What makes you think so?"

Val swung round abruptly. He fully expected the savage blaze of a revolver in his ribs, but instead his surprise action knocked a small hand torch into the gutter. The girl, shabbily dressed,

perhaps thirty years old, faced him. He could see her face was white and trembling with both anger and grief.

"This—this was the gun?" Val asked, picking the torch up.

"Yes," she admitted in a low voice. She stared at him through gray eyes moist with tears. "—I don't know what I'm doing, I guess. Honest I don't! I use the torch for seeing my way up that rotten hole of a staircase back home. I—" She broke off and shrugged, calming. "Well, hand me over for attempted assault. You win."

"You've got me all wrong, Miss Mane," Val answered seriously, giving her back her torch. "It happens that I know your father was murdered, but I had nothing to do with it. It was Kronheim's own doing . . . You say you saw your father run down? Naturally you let the police on the spot know your identity?"

"No. I didn't tell anybody. I think I went crazy." Gloria Mane's voice came in jerks. "I just thought out this idiotic plan to catch somebody belonging to Kronheim's organization and make him confess the truth to the police . . . If only you knew what this all means!" she cried hoarsely. "I warned dad, over and over. I know he planned to sell his sinking bomb—nothing more than that."

"He sold it all right—for a million dollars," Val said grimly. "I made out the contract myself—but Kronheim took the million back by force during the accident to your father. Your dad had no patent right on his invention, therefore there's no evidence of his creation of the idea."

"But he *was* the inventor of it—"

"I know it, and so do you, Miss Mane. You and I are the only two people who can prove that Kronheim both stole and murdered—"

"Yeah? Don't be too sure, wise guy!"

Val and the girl turned together. The figures of two men in soft hats and big overcoats were dimly visible in the shadows of a nearby doorway. Without a vestige of warning a gun blazed suddenly. Gloria Mane's lips parted in a half cry, then with both hands at her breast she toppled forward and crashed motionless on the sidewalk.

"Figure that out, Mr. Val Turner," came a sneering voice, and the still smoking gun was flipped towards him from the gloom to clatter at his feet.

BEFORE Val had the chance to collect his wits doors and windows seemed to sprout open all around him from the tenements. Men and women appeared, drawn by the shot. They stared at him as he picked up the revolver and gazed at the sprawling woman at his feet. It seemed only a matter of seconds before a squad car screamed to a halt at the curb.

Confused, bewildered, Val heard pronouncements from the general jabber of voices.

"This woman is dead. Shot through the heart."

"Come on, you!" Val found himself seized. Grim-jawed officers seemed to be all around him.

ROLF KRONHEIM was just leaving his office for the night when the private wire buzzed.

"Well?" he asked briefly, and it was strong arm Joe's voice that greeted him.

"We got on the track of the Mane daughter as you told us, chief. Spotted her outside the Trust building. At least we figured it was her from the way she was behavin'. We followed her—and in case you don't know it Turner knows all about the killing of Mane. He told the dame that much."

"Then why the hell didn't you—"

"We did, chief. We shot the dame

through the heart and left Turner to take the rap. It's up to you now. You can stick a murder rap on him if you want. If you want me I'm at Toni's Cafe."

Kronheim smiled. "Remind me to give you a bonus, Joe. Good night."

THE machinations of Kronheim thereafter were far-reaching. Val, for reasons best known to himself, refused to say anything in his own defense. His lawyer talked himself hoarse, using what evidence he could find. Most of it had been supplied by Val's wife—and the extraordinary thing was that Rita Turner was partly successful in her fight against the colossus. At least she found enough to make portions of the charge against Val seem doubtful. He escaped the chair and was commuted to life sentence.

It seemed to him that the world had crashed in ruins. He remembered his wife's brave, tear-streaked face in the courtroom, then he found it replaced by the inflexible visages of warders. Alcatraz, gray and inexorable, filled the future.

To Kronheim the verdict caused some irritation, nor was he backward at saying so.

"Turner is out of the way behind prison walls, yes, where he can't prove anything," he said bitterly. "But he isn't dead! And as long as he lives there is always the slender chance that he may escape. And if he does . . ."

"He'll give you what you deserve, eh?" Standish asked dryly.

"He'll be vindictive," Kronheim corrected, glaring. "His wife is no sap, either. She got enough evidence to make it second degree murder instead of first, anyway. She's free—and I don't quite like it."

Standish said, "If you're figuring on wiping her out too, count me out. That killing of Gloria Mane was too close to

the hairline for my liking. Next time you may not be so lucky. I value my neck, Kronheim, even if you don't."

Kronheim's next words seemed to indicate he had dropped the subject.

"About those bombs? How much longer will you be?"

"I'm all set. I followed out your orders and got thousands of them manufactured. They're being distributed now through the usual undercover channels to our agents."

"And the airplane factories? We're ready there?"

"Completely. When you give the word the underground factories are ready to disgorge. Our agents, by the use of the Mane bombs, can sabotage every defense unit in the country. We can have America under the heel now any time we want. Our air armada when released will crush all opposition by terror bombing alone."

"Hmm . . ." Kronheim pondered. "How far down do you plan to sink the Mane bombs under industrial and defense centers?"

"About quarter of a mile. That should be sufficient."

"I don't think so. I don't just want an ordinary explosion to wreck vital centers—I want the entire centers to drop down a mine from which they can never be retrieved—"

"It can't be done," Standish said quietly. "We have to remember that the earth has inner forces. If we drop the bombs too low they might split a volcanic seam. Anything could happen then!"

"As long as we have the Cause ruling the country at the finish of the campaign I don't care if we release hell itself!" Kronheim retorted. "Sink those bombs down five miles. When they blow I want mines into which men and units and buildings will drop. Understand?"

"It's too big a risk, man!" Standish cried.

"I'm not going to argue, Standish," Kronheim said slowly. "I have instructed our European headquarters to sink the bombs down five miles and we'll do the same here!"

STANDISH'S face was anxious. He had a sudden mental picture of agents of the Cause scattered in their sneaking thousands about the globe dropping the silent, self-sinking bombs in all manner of places. He was a scientist; Kronheim was not. Therein lay the tragedy.

"Finished?" Kronheim asked coldly.

Standish said, "I was just thinking that if one of those bombs rips a volcanic seam it might conceivably blow the lid right off a whole continent! We're fighting for the domination of a world, not the total destruction of everything it contains! You've got to stop at a quarter-mile depth for safety's sake. Explosions are O.K., but wholesale subsidences are another thing altogether."

The big man smiled slowly. But Standish was looking at the eyes.

"Now wait a minute, Kronheim! I know what I'm talking about—"

"Of course," Kronheim purred. "Of course. I'll do just as you say. Now, get out!" he roared. "The Cause has no use for men who turn yellow! *Get out!*"

Standish left, perspiration dewing his face. The eyes of Kronheim seemed to be in the corridor before him. Too many times had the chief smiled only with his lips.

And the evening papers carried a column headed:

KRONHEIM TRUST SCIENTIST DROWNED

Nobody attempted to offer an explanation, beyond suicide. For that matter nobody could—except Rita Turner.

STANLEY WADE of the Federal Department was surprised when Rita Turner was shown into his office. In a moment he knew from her sober dark eyes and taut mouth that something was wrong.

"You heard of the death of Professor Standish, the scientist at the Kronheim Trust?" she asked quietly, sitting down.

Wade nodded slowly. "Yes, Mrs. Turner, I heard. You mean his suicide?"

"That wasn't suicide, Inspector—it was deliberate, cold-blooded murder. Standish was slain, just the same as were Dr. Mane and his daughter Gloria. Yes, I know my husband was accused of murdering Gloria Mane, but that was a frame-up."

"After all, the rights and wrongs of that case were decided by the grand jury," Wade replied. "There's nothing I can do about it."

"I'm not asking you to. Val is safer in jail than out of it. What I am suggesting is that the authorities open their eyes a bit! Three deaths in succession and all of them connected with the Kronheim Trust. The facts at my husband's trial showed some totally false love affair to be the cause of Val's shooting Gloria Mane. Corruption and wangling in lawyer's circles, backed by Kronheim—and Val's own silence—stopped the real truth getting out. Gloria Mane was murdered by Kronheim's strong arm men, just as her father was murdered by a hit and run driver in Kronheim's employ. Kronheim destroyed Dr. Mane for one good reason. He feared his scientific knowledge—and the other reason was that Kronheim didn't want a million dollars to go out of his bank. There was no proof that Mane had ever invented a scientific device because he never patented it. Everybody knowing anything about it

was rubbed out, and so would Val have been too but for my efforts at weakening Kronheim's lawyer's evidence."

Wade leaned forward on his desk. "Just who gave you all this information about Kronheim, may I ask?"

"Val himself," the girl replied briefly. "I saw him at the jail on visitors' day. He told me to tell you."

"Why didn't he tell all this at the trial?"

"Can't you see?" Rita cried. "He *dared* not! To have gained his liberty by indicting Kronheim would have made him the target for killers all over the city—killers under Kronheim's control. Anyway Kronheim would have wriggled free and Val's life would have been jeopardized from that moment onwards. He preferred to give just enough evidence to avoid first degree murder and afterwards work from comparative safety to prove his innocence—through me . . .

"You see, Val was Kronheim's personal secretary. He made out the contract and check for a million dollars to Mane. The contract was for a new type of bomb—a bomb that sinks by itself through the ground. Now, in a neutral country, isn't that a queer occurrence?"

"Sinks through the ground?" Wade cried. "I don't understand."

RITA gave a tired smile. "Inspector, you like the rest of America think Kronheim and his Trust is limited to a financial edifice in Wall Street. That isn't so, as Val well knows. A whole network of steelworks and industries are controlled by Kronheim, and they in turn are cover ups for other more sinister activities . . . There is a European war on, even though we in America feel geographically isolated from it. That may have dulled our alertness—but the things Kronheim's doing threaten to menace our peace at

any moment! Investigate the man and his activities! Do it in the interests of general safety, not to clear Val particularly. That will logically follow and he's safe enough at present."

Wade sat thinking, then finally he said. "Well, it all sounds very fantastic, Mrs. Turner, and I can't help thinking that if there were anything mysterious going on our Intelligence Department would know all about it. And the War Department, too . . ."

"Even if Kronheim agents happened to be in both departments?"

"Good Lord, you're not suggesting—"

"Definitely!" the girl retorted. "Rolf Kronheim is an organizing genius, an utterly ruthless agent for European power. He is even a European by birth: I checked up on that for myself. Once in my husband's hearing he said he did not care how many Americans he killed . . . That is the kind of man he is."

"I'll get a line on him, anyway," Wade said grimly.

"In the meantime," Rita finished, "I want protective custody. Now I've told you all this I'm not risking going into the outer world again. I know what I'm up against—and so will you, shortly."

ANGORSTINE, Kronheim Agent No. 1, cesspool for orders and instructions of intense secrecy between Europe and the big man himself, was one of the first to learn of Federal activity. Instantly he headed for Wall Street, deserting the complex post he filled somewhere in the European Embassy.

"What's the idea of risking coming here?" Kronheim snapped.

The brute-headed, thick-lipped Angorstine gave a calm answer.

"I thought it better to take the risk and come personally than use the tele-

phone. The Federal Authorities are out to clean up our entire organization."

"Huh? *What?*" Kronheim stared amazedly. "But they don't know a thing, man—"

"Yes, they do. I've been told that Turner told his wife plenty on her visit to the prison. She told Wade—and what's more she convinced him. She has a way of convincing people has that woman. The machinery is moving, Kronheim—and moving fast!"

Kronheim's fist slammed on the desk. "I'll get that damned nosy woman if it's the last thing I do! I knew it wasn't safe as long as Turner didn't fry! I'll see that she's—"

"You can't. She asked for—and—got—protective custody."

Kronheim's lips twitched at the sudden setback. Angorstine went on talking with sudden urgency.

"Either we act now or never! You're in charge of the American campaign and Standish left everything ready. Our agents are everywhere, ready to set those bombs going down five miles just as you ordered. All key points are covered. In other parts of the world everything is ready too. The Cause can blast the neutrals wide open. The war can end in a few months, Kronheim, and the Cause can be victorious!"

"It's forcing my hand," Kronheim muttered, gazing at the man's square, brutal face.

"If the authorities force it you're done. Act! Give me the word and in three days we will be well away. Give me an appointed time for the planes to move, for the bombs to explode, for the defense units to be immobilized. Too late America will realize that in neutrality she has found destruction. The Mane bomb will bring democracy and all the idiocy it stands for smashing into the dust!"

Kronheim's jaws squared suddenly.

"Very well, Angorstine—get busy! Time the bombs for explosion six hours after sinking below ground surface. Time the entire movement of forces for midnight, three days hence. I'll move to the underground headquarters. In the meantime I will contact Europe and make sure they give our move their blessing at headquarters. That's all."

"That day for which we have fought and struggled and bled is very near," Angorstine mused, smiling twistedly. "So very near."

CHAPTER III

DOMINATION

AS Stanley Wade began to get the reports of his men operating the Federal dragnet cast across the United States he began to discover things that completely backed up Rita Turner's vehement assertions. It seemed quite unbelievable, and yet—

"Agents of European power everywhere," Wade breathed, looking through the papers on his desk. "The whole country's infested with them! Spies! Spies who believe the force they worship can rule the world." He looked up at the worried faces of the men of the Intelligence Department, the police, the Customs, and other departments of public security.

"We have only ourselves to blame, gentlemen," Wade went on in a low voice. "It is as Mrs. Turner said: we have taken too much for granted. We allowed Kronheim to continue his work, all unsuspecting. We never realized that the Consolidated Steel Corporation, the Blue Oil Combine, the International Federation, and God knows how many other big enterprises, were connected with and controlled by Kronheim himself. He spreads his

devilish tentacles all over the country."

"Just what do we do?" one of the representatives asked anxiously.

"Do? We've got to round up all these agents and the rings they control. In the meantime I'm referring the matter to the President himself. This is too big for one man to handle. I've got to have a parole for Turner, too. He knows plenty and can probably help us. The rest is up to you to work on as you see fit. Go to it."

Thereafter wires began to buzz. Federal experts took fast planes in various directions: some went to Washington. The whole law machine of the United States went to work in grim earnest. In spite of an elastic censorship clamping the press some of the news seeped through to a wondering public.

The *Clarion* wanted to know—CAN WAR STRIKE HERE? But it could not definitely answer its own question because of lack of facts, and since the radio networks were forced to use hush-hush methods also there was no explanation from that end either.

Rolf Kronheim, fully alive to the situation, worked ceaselessly. Hour by hour there came through the multiple strands of his web a series of reports collected by Angorstine. Vital centers were already in hand. Bombs, accurately timed, were ready for midnight and in the desired positions. Along every coast, in every public utility, in armament works, depots, Government offices themselves: throughout the length and breadth of the continent the ruthless undercover power of a warring regime was at work to smash this, the greatest of all democratic States.

On that third day the hours, fateful indeed for still puzzled Americans, crept onwards and the shadow deepened over peace. Inevitably news

leaked out. There were hints of lightning war, invasion by long distance bombers, submarine attack—probably everything was thought of except destruction from within.

Certainly nobody thought of self-sinking bombs—except Val Turner. His parole granted by extraordinary Board meeting, he thought of the Mane bombs as he sat in the Government plane whirling him from Alcatraz island across the continent to New York.

"Say, it's dark down there," he observed, and his guard nodded grimly.

"Yeah. Black out in force. Just a precaution. Something blowing up, I guess."

"I suppose," Val said, "you don't know what the Federal Authorities paroled me for?"

"Even if I did know it's not my job to say anything. I was ordered to collect and deliver. The rest is up to Inspector Wade. You'll find out everything when we hit New York."

Val became silent. He pretty well guessed why he was wanted. He knew that nothing short of national necessity and his knowledge of Kronheim could have gotten him parole so soon. He sat turning the matter over in his mind, gazing on the darkness outside.

EVEN New York itself was partially blacked out. The public in general, baffled by the sudden serious turn in events and lack of decisive news, seemed to be thronging the gloomy streets. The police car had to siren its way through seething crowds to Federal headquarters.

Inside the building Wade's office was brilliantly lighted. He looked tired and worried, had his coat off to his task. In the office were officials and, in the far corner, Rita Turner herself. She sprang to her feet as Val entered.

Wade allowed them their brief, earnest greeting, then he said curtly.

"Turner, it looks as though your story to your wife here told us plenty we didn't know about. I sent for you to give us more details. Granting there is time to act on them, that is."

"Sure. How much do you want to know? Kronheim is an enemy agent, a master organizer—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that. Do you know the names of any of his agents?"

Val shook his head. "Afraid not. Every man and woman working for him secretly had a number. I used to think they were contract numbers until I got to thinking things over in prison. Then it dawned on me that they must be agents—"

"How many?"

"The numbers went up to ninety-two thousand."

Wade threw up his hands and gazed around. "There we are, gentlemen! From these reports here I calculated around ninety thousand men and women in the pay of foreign power. Some of them—most of them—are supposed to be good living American citizens. At any rate they seek shelter under our flag. They are employees of Kronheim—his trusted workers. Saboteurs, spies—rats!" he shouted savagely. "For months—for two years in fact, since the war began in Europe, Kronheim has been at work arranging for the total destruction of America. Through a slip up Turner here got a clue. In a few days we have tried to catch up on the greatest organized effort to destroy a country ever yet made. I don't see how we're to do it. We can't rope in ninety thousand suspects in a few hours or days."

"Get Kronheim himself—he's the chief," Turner urged.

"Knowing Kronheim is guilty is one thing: proving it is another," Wade retorted. "He is fenced in by a wall of legal network which would require

weeks of intensified effort to break down. We're working on it, never fear. We've collected some of the agents and pinned them down to confessions. We've got *something*, but not by any means enough. That's where you come in, Turner. You've got to recall every detail of your employment with Kronheim. You must—"

Wade swung around as the phone buzzed. His face assumed various expressions as he listened. He kept nodding dazedly, then with a faint grunt of acknowledgment he put the instrument back.

"Intelligence Department," he announced. "A report has just been received that two hundred heavy bombing planes have been seen massed on an airfield near Dayton in Ohio."

"But—but we've no plane concentrations there!" cried the Air Ministry expert.

"That's the point," Wade said slowly. "This news has been despatched to all defense points and the next orders will come from the Ministry of War. *Those planes are not ours!* That speaks for itself. They have been brought from some secret factory, probably underground, near Dayton. It is not coincidence that the Ropa Engineering Works is situated in Dayton, particularly since the Ropa works is owned by the Kronheim Trust. There are twenty Kronheim interests scattered in all parts of America. If one factory secretly produces two hundred planes the rest is simple arithmetic. Twenty factories—two hundred bombers each—four thousand planes! And not one of them ours!"

"You mean," Turner said slowly, "that we're too late?"

"Yes." Wade thumped his desk helplessly. "This thing has been going on too long. We got wind of it too late. Tonight America finds the war right on her own doorstep."

"And of course our defense units will be asleep?" demanded the Air Ministry expert. "Our army will be paralyzed? We'll let this attack be a walkover?"

WADE walked wearily to the window and gazed outside on the dark bulk of the metropolis. "I don't know," he replied slowly. "I have no real idea yet how far the Kronheim virus has penetrated into our national system."

He shrugged, glanced at his watch. It was exactly midnight.

"We'd better—" he started to say, then suddenly the office light went out. Coupled with the blackness outside the dark was pitchy.

"What the devil—?" exploded one of the men. "What is it? Blackout regulation from the powerhouse? May be a fused lamp."

He had hardly finished speaking before a tremendous concussion, deep-seated and heavy, rolled through the night. Far away towards the harbors flames split the ebony darkness as masonry and steel went skywards in a ragged column. Not a moment later there was a second explosion of like force—and then two more. In the space of as many minutes no less than six fires were blazing in different directions, crimsoning the metropolis in lurid brilliance.

"Sabotage!" shouted the air official hoarsely, staring out. "A given signal for sabotage! Explosives!"

"Mane bombs," snapped Turner, holding his wife tightly. "Mane bombs at a tremendous depth filled with super-powerful explosive."

"Any way of dealing with 'em?" Wade demanded.

"Not that I know of. They're a scientific product and the only two men who might have controlled them—Standish and Mane himself—are dead."

There was a sudden stir in the office.

The officials left hurriedly for their various departments. Outside, pandemonium was rising. People were running and shouting, sirens were wailing. Out in the harbor ships hooted stridently.

"Listen!" Rita Turner exclaimed suddenly. "Listen!"

Above the rattle and din from below there came a dull beating, droning sound, growing increasingly louder—then in the center of the city, right in the middle of the ring of fires, a bomb exploded with appalling violence.

"It's an air raid!" Rita screamed. "Bombing planes!"

Wade and Val stared out of the window just in time to see a black fleet moving slowly across the starlit heaven. . . . Another whine—and another tremendous explosion. A building in the distance belched outward and vanished in the smother.

"Why don't the defense units do something?" Rita shouted. "Why don't they? There are no searchlights—no antiaircraft! Where *is* everybody? Are we to stand here and be shot at?"

"Down!" Val snapped suddenly, and he pulled his wife and Wade to the floor violently. A second later a bomb exploded on the building opposite, rocked the Federal building and sent a cascade of glass hurtling across the office floor. Crackling flames roared to heaven from across the street and added their glare to the tumult.

THE bombing planes were clearly visible now, painted dark gray, with the European Ensign on wings and body. They were circling, intent on bombing New York and nothing else. And still there was no sign of antiaircraft fire or interceptor fighting planes.

"Why?" Rita groaned, shuddering.

"Obvious, isn't it?" Val asked her. "Kronheim has obviously used Mane bombs to blow up the industrial and

defense points of the country. The destruction of the power houses put out the lights. The air bases, the soldiers' barracks, the mobile headquarters—all the lot mined and destroyed. Possibly he may have men of his own to take over the antiaircraft units and they won't fire on their own planes. The whole scheme is a masterpiece of devilry."

"That's how I figure it," Wade breathed. "I knew tonight when I got that last phone call that we were beaten. Those planes spelt the end. Beaten by a continent three thousand miles across the ocean. Maybe we deserve it."

"A few of the American defense units will be bound to get busy," Val mused. "Not every defense sector and soldier in the United States can be incapacitated. That isn't feasible. And the ships round the coasts—they'll do plenty."

"Yeah? What? They can only shell towns, and that way they'll kill more Americans than enemy."

"But terror bombing of civilians doesn't decide a war! It demands land forces to seize a country."

"I rather think Kronheim will have thought of that," Wade grunted. First, terror bombing to smash morale—then his agents to hold key-centers which control light, water, electricity, phone communication, radio, air service, food. Huh! Get rid of the idea that you have to conquer a country with infantry, Turner. It can be done by clever planning when you've a brain like Kronheim's."

Wade got slowly to his feet and glanced up at the planes as they droned to the east of the fire-racked city.

"They've headed away for the moment," he said. "Now's our chance to get moving. Safest place is down the subway at the corner. Come on."

He wrenched open the door and the

two fled after him through the deserted smoke-filled building. In two minutes they had reached the street, found it packed with struggling, shouting people, some of them with blood streaming down their faces, others searching frantically amidst fallen debris.

"Down here!" Wade snapped—and the three of them joined the mad, jostling throng crushing down the subway entrance.

THE spirit of Dr. Mane must have viewed the results of his self-sinking bomb with bitter condemnation. Timed to perfection and released at the vast depth specified by Kronheim, they performed their appalling work with crushing thoroughness.

In dozens of key points the industrial and defensive centers of the United States crashed inwards into raging mines of smoke and flame. In other parts whole army training grounds and national militia headquarters vanished into the earth. There were cases where spouting jets of lava hurled from below killed and maimed far more people than the actual bomb disaster. As Kronheim had planned, none of his agents was caught. Once they had started their particular lot of bombs sinking they vanished to take their place somewhere else in the merciless machine of domination now fully under way. In the main the agents scattered to anti-aircraft units to force the Americans in charge to hold their fire. Kronheim was counting on air power and destruction of defenses for his first move, and the power of agents for the second and decisive blow.

THROUGH Canadian radio the world heard of the sudden onslaught on the United States in stunned amazement or Satanic delight, depending on who was the listener. In England, still holding its own with a rigid

defense system and inexorable control of aliens, there was literal peace and quiet compared to what was happening in America.

But London voiced its horror through Parliament as the American destruction went on unabated. An R.A.F. air fleet would leave at once to lend assistance.

Kronheim had waited for the move. Through his network the word was passed on. England had depleted itself to aid America: now was the time to strike them a crushing blow. Agents began to move secretly through the ports despite the inexorable attention of the Customs. . . .

The United States, assisted after the first few hours by all the strength of Canada, who poured her air force over the borders, fought madly to regain balance from the sledgehammer blow—but, relying on the theory that lightning attack is the key to victory, Kronheim pressed on. His planes continued their onslaught. Destruction rained from the sky on every big city. Still exploding Mane bombs took charges of all points of opposition. Canada, her attention diverted, failed to detect agents at work with further bombs within her own borders.

The United States' anti-aircraft units came into action at last—but agents controlled them. Not European but Canadian planes were shot down. Here and there a Kronheim bomber was destroyed by surviving anti-aircraft crews: here and there death or victory fighters, both American and Canadian, plunged to the attack. Futilely.

By day, by night, through hours that seemed hewn out of Hell itself, the battle raged, Kronheim directing operations by radio from his specially devised underground shelter far under the now demolished Trust edifice.

Little by little the remaining fighters for democracy realized they were strug-

gling against an all-powerful enemy. Depleted in airplane supplies by reason of the European conflict draining their resources they had not the reserves necessary to keep up with Kronheim and his hidden factories. As fast as a Kronheim plane was destroyed two appeared to take its place.

Of the French and British planes sent over the Atlantic only half the number arrived. The rest were intercepted by European long distance fighters and enemy warships placed in the Atlantic for such an offensive.

Two weeks passed. The intensity of the battle began to cool off. Dead and wounded thousands lay in the smoky skeleton ruins of the American cities. Those who were still alive crept about helplessly in blank fear of what was coming next. There seemed to be men marching everywhere now: death from the sky seemed to have ceased. Just men, armed, with grimly determined faces.

Many of them were Americans obeying new orders. They sent the wounded to makeshift hospitals and had the dead loaded into trucks. But everything they did seemed to be at the point of the gun, and the dazed civilians obeyed because there was nothing else for it. What did seem significant was that all the men wore armlets—the armlet of European power.

CHAPTER IV

CAMP 4

VAL TURNER and Rita, hungry and exhausted, were wandering with the rest of the survivors through the bomb-shattered metropolis when armletted officials at last caught up with them. What had happened to Stanley Wade was problemati-

cal. Probably he was dead. The destruction of the subway had sent Val and Rita pelting for safety through a crumbling inferno of bricks and steel. They had a confused memory of living through a nightmare of explosions, of missing death or serious injury by inches, then finally of a gradual abatement in the onslaught. By the time they were captured they were too weary, physically and mentally, to speak.

With hundreds of others they were thrust into a ruthlessly ransacked store doing service as a prison. Perhaps it was days, perhaps weeks, during which they were fed on dry bread and water. Then one by one their dispirited colleagues were drafted off by the armletted men to parts unknown. Finally it came to their turn.

"Names?" the official inquired briefly.

Val gave them coldly and the man consulted his list. His eyes seemed to brighten a little.

"Our Commander must see you immediately."

"Kronheim, eh?" Val's smile was cynical in his blond beard.

"Naturally. Get moving!"

"And you call yourself an American!" Val whispered, clenching his fists. "By God, if ever there was a traitor—"

"Not every man in America is a democrat," the official retorted. "Policies change, and with them—people. Now move!"

"Come on," Rita urged. "You can't argue with a gun, Val. . . ."

He hesitated and then shrugged his heavy shoulders. The official piloted them through files of wearily standing men and women to a part of the city that had been Wall Street. Entering by an inlet of steel and concrete they passed through a narrow passage and so finally to a wide underground room

with its own little power house for light and radio.

Kronheim sat at his desk. It was littered with maps and papers. At the rear stood the scrub-headed Angorstine, his lips pouting cushions. The electric clock on the wall made an ungodly halo for his skull.

"The Turners," announced the guard briefly, then with a salute he turned and went out.

Kronheim looked up with his icy blue eyes. His lips smiled.

"So you did not die after all," he murmured. "Well, how truly remarkable! And, in a way, most providential."

"You can skip the build-up, Kronheim," Val snapped.

Kronheim still smiled. "I gave special orders that if you were found alive you were to be brought to me. Your—er—honesty in giving your own names has saved you from a firing squad, probably. Practically all enemies of the new regime are being lined up and shot."

"What's different about us?" Val blazed. "Neither of us have anything in common with you and your bunch of cut-throats. I speak for my wife, of course, as well as myself."

The girl nodded her head slowly.

"Shooting," Kronheim said, "is the quick way out. It is due to you, Turner, because you escaped prison regime by reason of the recent change in American affairs. I am a just man, however. I have decided you shall return to prison, but certain new regulations will be enforced upon you. Your wife, because of her complicity with you in getting your rightful sentence of death commuted to life sentence, will also go to prison. . . . I don't want to kill you because I think it a fitting punishment that you should live long enough to see the changes that are going to come to America. . . .

"All over this country labor camps are being set up. Those capable of work will be drafted to them. The new European America will be built . . . and you two will help to build it! Every time you stumble the lash will remind you that there can be only one master and one mind. You will realize that you are one of the masses—you will even remember perhaps that you both tried once to cross me! You were both prepared to die for democracy. Perhaps that chance will still be yours."

BOTH Val and Rita kept silent. They were appalled by the vision that had risen before them—the scene of a free America trampled underfoot by merciless oppression.

"So you have nothing to say?" Kronheim asked in surprise. He got to his feet and pointed to a vast world-map on the wall. "See how we are progressing?" he inquired, his eyes glinting. "Through war we have gained half of Europe. France and Spain are being broken down by the Mane bombs. Other bombs are at work in Southern Europe and in Russia. America we have already mastered: Canada will be next. Great Britain is cracking. Once it was said that world conquest was impossible. . . . Maybe it was right at the time: it was the Mane bomb that made such a cause possible. One scientist gave us the world—the world of power, the control of Mankind to certain tasks, which is as it should be. Free thinking is a dangerous weapon for the masses. They do not know how to use it."

If Kronheim expected a furious outburst from Val he was disappointed. Instead Val said, "And you think we're going to lie down under it? You're idiot enough to believe you can rule everything and meet with no opposition? O. K.—try it! Dr. Mane gave you bombs . . . but perhaps that

wasn't all he gave you."

"Meaning?" Kronheim snapped, a memory of Standish flashing across his brain.

Val only smiled through his beard. Kronheim snapped his fingers.

"Take them out. Labor duty. Camp 4."

He watched them go, in the grip of soldiers, then Angorstine said.

"You're not letting that fool Turner upset you, surely? If we have been allowed to get this far by whatever is supposed to hold the world in its fist it is sufficient assurance that we are right. *Might is right!* We have proved it. Look here . . .?"

With a satisfied smile he handed over a typewritten sheet.

"The Mane bombs are working everywhere," he breathed. "Naples is undermined, so are most parts of London. The capitals of the Orient, of the Far North and South. India. The Day is very near, Kronheim."

"What's this?" Kronheim asked curtly. He did not seem to have heard a word of his aide's lustful vaporings. He was looking at a totally different report.

"That?" Angorstine looked surprised. "Why, nothing. Just the details of a lava flow from near San Francisco. One of the Mane bomb pits started it."

"Did, eh?" Kronheim's eyes narrowed. "We hit a volcanic seam?"

"Possibly. One runs right under America near Frisco. Had a lot to do with the 1906 earthquake, I understand. But what of it—?"

"I want a geologist," Kronheim said slowly. "I don't care what term he's serving, who he is, but get one. There are some things I want to know right away. Give the order to the camps, too. Find somebody with a good physiography knowledge.

"But—"

"Get one!" Kronheim yelled.

Angorstine frowned and went out scratching his head. An echo of the murdered Standish was ringing through Kronheim's barbaric brain.

A WEEK went by in Labor Camp 4 before Val and Rita fully realized what they were up against. Though separated during working hours they found ways and means, as did the others, of getting together in the off hours. The guard made no attempt to stop the union. There was no way of escape from within the railed inclosure anyway. Electrification of all barriers was possible at a moment's notice.

Day work meant ten hours of incessant hard labor in building up the ruins Kronheim's air fleet had created. The former American style of skyscrapers was, it appeared, to be excluded now in favor of long squat edifices of a new principle.

In one week Val found out plenty. Most of the camp guards were Europeans with a good knowledge of English. Not all of them were brutal at heart, though they obviously had to obey orders. The laxest man of the lot was the Captain of the Guard, rather too old for his job. Val was surprised to find that whip and gun seemed spared quite a lot, even though the ten hours labor was enforced on all men and women from 14 to 60. To exchange views on the regulations was to ask for death, but deep in Val's mind was a growing fury for the slavery, a fury fanned every time he saw his wife's drawn, weary face through the barbed wire at a quiet end of the two camps.

"Where is it all going to end, Val?" she asked him hopelessly, one night. "The whole country—and probably the whole world before long—mowed down and sacrificed to power? It isn't sane! It just can't obtain. So many against so few."

"That isn't it," he said gravely. "The few have the power and the many have not . . ."

THEY were both mute for a moment or two, looking at each other in the glare of the floodlights. Around them roared the eternal propaganda from the loudspeakers. As usual they spouted tales of conquest; some of it true, and the rest of it at variance with the facts Val had heard by word of mouth. It was these little items drifting from the lips of oppressed prisoners that interested him most.

"May be revolt yet," he whispered presently. "The Captain is pretty stupid. There's probably a way around him. There is another thing, too. You remember me telling Kronheim that Mane probably gave him something more than bombs?"

Rita nodded quickly. Val's face, shaven clean like his head, was grinning bitterly.

"It wasn't just talk," he breathed. "The further Kronheim and his European masters and agents sink the world into destruction by the indiscriminate use of Mane bombs, the nearer comes the end of the whole damned control."

"Why? How?"

Val glanced hurriedly round, leaned closer through the wire.

"Those bombs, as we know, have been sunk five miles down. Reports have come through from different sources that they have done more than just blast a mine in the earth. They have released volcanic matter—even in America here which is not definitely in the volcanic zone . . . I figured such a thing would happen because when I was in Alcatraz I spent my off time reading geology books from the prison library. One of them said volcanic seams start at three miles down or less. Read the books specially as a matter of fact thinking I might do something

about it if I got out of jail. I figured using Mane bombs for the very purposes Kronheim accidentally found. Only I figured it out to bring us victory. He's sowing world destruction—only the mug doesn't know it yet."

"But how do a few volcanic seams upset this regime?" Rita asked breathlessly.

"It's not just that: it's how long they continue that counts. Once you start breaking the seals on the earth's inner forces you're letting out Trouble. Kronheim's started a juggernaut rolling over the world—"

"Move on there!"

The girl was suddenly swung aside by 200 pounds of female granite. At the same moment Val found himself pushed away by one of his own guards. He wandered off, hands in pockets, and presently found himself facing the undersized figure of Bilworthy.

Bilworthy's eyes had the bright little gleam of a rat's. He gave a slow smile as he hoarded the smoke of a prized cigarette end in his throat.

"Tellin' your wife plenty, weren't you?" he asked dryly.

"So what?" Val eyed him bitterly. "What the hell were you doing listening?"

"Why not? Don't we all pick up news?" Bilworthy grinned the wider and smoke escaped from his stained teeth. He went away scratching his whiskery, receding skin.

Val looked after him through narrowed eyes. Three times he had encountered the slimy little prisoner poking his nose where it was not wanted. There was something about him that got thoroughly up Val's back.

With an involuntary shudder he turned away to listen to the propaganda and cull from it what facts he could. In between the lines he learned plenty. Vesuvius was in violent eruption, for one thing, and hindering war activity.

The Bay of Naples was in the midst of the greatest lava discharge in history. In England an extinct volcano in the Cumberland mountains had returned to life and was belching fire and destruction for nearly fifty miles over the war-racked island. China was suffering from earthquakes. In America the stubborn lava flow from the Frisco crater was if anything getting worse.

The facts were all treated lightly in the broadcast, but for Val they registered right on the button. He lounged in a corner of the camp ground and grinned to himself, and the guard who moved him on wondered vaguely what the hell there was to be amused about.

WHATEVER plans were afoot for a revolt received an untimely check the following morning when it was found Camp 4 had a new Captain of the Guard.

Val and his fellow prisoners saw the man for the first time at the line-up for building detail. Unlike his lax predecessor this individual insisted on preliminary inspection of his charges first. He walked slowly down the line with his hands on his hips.

He was big, possibly six feet three, with the shoulders and neck of a prize bullock. His uniform was smart, his boots polished like mirrors. His cap he wore at an angle on his shaven head. His face had square jaws and high cheekbones. His mouth slanted perpetually as he talked to reveal a line of magnificent teeth. His eyes were blue—a cold hard blue with more than a hint of the devil in them.

"There's been too much sentiment around here," he shouted, walking along slowly. "Too much!" He looked at the passive faces keenly and his short whip swung at his hip. "But it's going to change from now on! I've been a soldier all my life. See? I

know what men need to make 'em work, and that's discipline! *Discipline!* And you'll get it from me! We're building an Empire here and you dogs will work your ten hours a day to the full while I'm in charge. Ten hours—no more, no less. I know my duty, and I do it! I am Abel Granvort, your new Captain of the Guard, better known as 'Ox.' Later on you'll find out why! All right, Sergeant Mead, take over . . . On your way! March!"

The file fell into line with the guards around them. But as Val went past Ox shot out his hand and whirled him to one side.

"Not you," he said briefly. "I want a word with you, Turner."

Val waited, eyeing the man steadily.

"So you think Leader Kronheim is digging his own grave, do you?" Ox asked slowly.

Val's eyes traveled to the undersized back of Bilworthy as he tramped away with the others.

"I spoke!" Ox bellowed.

"I heard you," Val said calmly, turning back to him. "I guess Bilworthy's been shooting off his mouth again, eh? Amazing what some people will do to try and get others into trouble . . . To answer your question, I do think Kronheim and his whole corrupt bunch are heading for trouble. Want to make something of it?"

Ox said briefly. "Come with me! March — one, two . . ." His shiny boots set the pace through the dust.

Val found himself taken to camp headquarters. Ox left him and stood aside at pokerlike attention. Kronheim was present with the inevitable thick-lipped Angorstine.

Kronheim came straight to the point. "Last night, Turner, I understand that you had a conversation with your wife amounting pretty close to treason. That was why I had the guard tightened up and put Captain Granvort in charge . . .

You had the impudence to tell your wife that we are destroying our regime by our own hand. What have you to say?"

"Nothing," Val answered coldly.

"You realize I could have you flogged and then shot? And your wife, too?"

AT that Ox stepped forward stiffly. "I submit, sir, that the woman had nothing to do with it," he said briefly. "She was the recipient of information, involuntarily, and not the giver. Therefore, according to military regulations she—"

"Damn you, man, shut up!" Kronheim roared. "Get back to your place and don't speak until you're told. . . . Now you!" He swung back to Val. "I could kill both you and your wife, but instead if you will give me some information I will spare you both and see that you have lighter duties."

"We don't want any favors, Kronheim. . . ." Val paused and shook his head. "At least I don't: but I have my wife to think of. What do you want to know?"

"Geologists and scientists are hard to find," Kronheim said grimly. "Many of them have been disposed of—but you seem to know something. It is common knowledge that severe volcanic eruptions are taking place everywhere, and my European masters have demanded to know how these troubles can be stopped. They blame me because I instituted the Mane bomb. Earthquakes and landslides are seriously impeding army operations. Heavy fogs are beginning to cover the seas from the intense heat at the ocean floor. That hinders air work. Rivers, filled with flowing lava are drying up. . . . You told your wife you read of the possibility of all this while you were in prison. In that case you may know how to stop it?"

"In other words, you're in a spot?"

"Answer my question!"

"O.K.—there's no way to stop it. If there was I would tell you—not because I've any regard for you but in the interests of all human beings. You sank the Mane bombs too deep, that's all. Later on, seams will open in the ocean beds and the fun will start in real earnest. Sea will pour into the gaps. Immense steam pressure will gather underground and blow chasms in the earth. . . ." Val paused and smiled bitterly. "What you and your blasted butchers actually started was the end of the world! You're getting the world, sure, just as you wanted—and you'll perish in it, horribly, like the rest of us. But for the rest of us it doesn't matter much because death is preferable to being ruled by you and yours."

If Kronheim was disturbed he did not show it. His voice was hard as steel when he spoke again. "You mean you *won't* help us?"

"I've told you the truth. Take it or leave it."

"I don't believe you," he said. He turned back to Ox. "Return him to camp and deliver twenty-five lashes to the prisoner each day for a week. Do it yourself. At the end of that time he may choose to speak more freely. For the moment his wife will escape the lash: later I may not be so lenient. It's up to you, Turner. . . ."

"You damnable, blasted—" Val started to say, then Ox whirled him outside.

"Wait a minute!" Val shouted, tearing himself free. "I've got things to tell that granite-faced hyena! I—"

"Move!" Ox commanded inexorably, whipping out his gun. "Quick march—one, two!"

Helplessly Val turned and marched back to the workers on the building job. Once there he waited for the shirt to be ripped from his back and the flogging to commence.

"Well, what in blazes are you waiting for?" Ox roared.

Val turned in amazement. "But Kronheim said—"

"To work!" Ox commanded. "Kronheim ordered *me* to flog you. Regulation 19 of a soldier's duty says a Captain can give orders but shall not execute them personally. That is for lesser ratings to do. Kronheim gave me an order I could not carry out . . . I know my duty and I do it! But that won't save you doing your ten hours," he finished with a sneer. "Ten hours—no more, no less! Get busy!"

Val turned, astounded at the rigid adherence of the man to laws and regulations. He seemed to be a brute by nature with Clauses A to Z blazoned on his rugged being. Yet somehow he made Val smile. As he worked he studied him, standing motionless with feet apart and hands on hips, a twisted grin on his square face.

Then Val looked at somebody else . . . Bilworthy.

CHAPTER V

THE ARK

NOT even the strangleholds of censorship or cooked news could entirely disguise the news leaking in in the days ensuing. A foggy steam settled over America and palled the Labor Camps completely. The guard was doubled to make escape impossible. Heat, too, smote the country like a white-hot bar. Reports came in of Etna, Vesuvius, Stromboli, Fujiyama, and other famous volcanoes going full blast. Smoke and scorching dust from their vigorous craters was penetrating into the atmosphere and producing the most extraordinary sunlight whenever it was glimpsed. The

sky seemed to be mixed with blue and magenta colorings through high dust film.

From Italy came the news of the total destruction of Sardinia and Corsica through volcanic eruption. Molten lava pouring into the sea had turned the Bay of Naples into a death caldron, paralyzing shipping, giving up dead and bloated fish and driving poisonous fumes across the Italian and south European lands. The whole southern end of the Italian peninsula indeed seemed to be sinking under the scalding sea.

In two places in the Atlantic fissures had occurred across the ocean floor creating incredible havoc. Swollen with steam pressure, whole masses of ocean bed had blown up and driven a wilderness of raging steam and water before them. Earthquakes in mid-Europe and Asia, lava floods in parts of the Himalayas which menaced India and vast parts of Mongolia, had started an exodus of refugees greater than that produced by the war itself.

The already filled Labor Camps in the conquered countries began to swell to overflowing with unending streams of survivors from all manner of climes. In Camp 4 alone the course of one day saw the addition of a thousand prisoners, some of them dark-skinned men and women of the East who had caught the last surviving boats from their doomed lands and sought the apparent safety of the former United States, only to drop into the hands of human foes instead. . . .

"WE HAVE got to revolt!" shouted one of the men in Val's camp one night, when they were gathered in the narrow dormitory preparatory to "lights out" order. "You told us what caused it, Val—those damned Mane bombs! The whole world is cracking up—rivers and seas evaporating—and we sit here and

take it! We've got to smash this regime to save our own lives."

Val looked at the angry worker thoughtfully, then he said:

"To revolt is the sure way to lose our lives, not save them, Hoyle."

"Then what *do* we do?" Hoyle spat out. "Sit here until we fry? The heat gets worse every day. We sweat and build and sweat some more, and that grinning swine of an Ox looks on and enjoys every minute of it! It can't go on—"

"Now listen, boys." Val got to his feet, set-faced. "Listen to me a minute. I've told you the truth every time so far, haven't I? I predicted this would happen though you doubted it at the time? Right?"

"Yeah, sure," admitted another. "But I agree with Hoyle that it's time we got action against Kronheim. The war is finished now by this upheaval of Nature and Kronheim and his European big shots are left as the masters of the world quicker than they had figured. . . . Are we going to sit down to *that*?"

"For the time being, yes," Val retorted. "In a while these vast volcanic upheavals will cease—they are bound to find a new level. But in that time something will happen. Seas and rivers are evaporating at top speed—but did you stop to think where the steam is going? Not all of it is included in the world-mist. . . ."

"What's that got to do with our revolt?" Hoyle shouted.

"Plenty! The conditions which existed at the beginning of the world are being repeated through a blunder of Kronheim's making! In the early days of the Earth vast heat drove colossal clouds of steam and vapor way out beyond the atmospheric limits. It formed into a ring round the Earth, drawn into that position by centrifugal force. A vast, vapor girdle wrapped the Earth about as today the rings of Saturn girdle

that giant planet. . . . Today, the driven steam from rivers and seas and lakes will do the same thing. The outer part of the ring will be frozen by space, the inner part still vapor by reason of the Earth's heat. But after a while the girdle will be inevitably drawn back to Earth and will condense. . . ."

"Then what?" asked Hoyle in a quieter voice.

"The Deluge," said Val gravely. "A world swept clean with only a few survivors. That is where this insane drive for domination is going to end. . . . But there will be a few who can perhaps build anew on better lines."

THE men looked at one another with blank faces, then they started talking all at once. They quieted again at the voice of a little, leathery-faced Mongolian who had been sitting passively listening. He spoke perfect English.

"You are right, my young friend, but you put it badly," he commented. "My name is Kang, by the way. I was driven here from Mongolia by disasters beyond the memory of man being again repeated. I foresaw long ago that the present happenings would repeat themselves in a Deluge. . . ."

He looked round on his listeners, smiled from his wizened visage.

"It is a matter of geologic history that the vapors ascended while the earth was hot and cooled into the Deluge when the Earth cooled—just as they will do now. In Jupiter we behold today a water canopy round the planet in the form of cloud belts. So must Earth have looked once. Proof of the original Deluge is imprinted forever in the legends and histories of nations. . . ."

"For instance?" Hoyle asked dryly.

The Mongolian shrugged. "The Japanese Bible—the *Kojiki*—refers to a 'floating bridge in heaven where live the Gods.' On the other hand, Veruna

—which as all sanskrit scholars know was the primitive Indian heaven of the Vedas—means when translated ‘watery Heaven.’ Again, Scandinavian history refers to a ‘bridge of heaven which broke through’—and does not your own orthodox Bible refer frequently to ‘the waters above and the waters below?’ Yes, there *was* a Deluge.”

“Yeah,” Hoyle admitted blankly. “Guess you’re right at that.”

There was a silence for a while. The words of the gnomelike intellectual had rather stunned them. Val was the first to recover.

“From the rate at which evaporation has gone on,” he resumed, “it is possible that the return of the waters to Earth when the cooling off begins may produce a flood which will cover the world! Even a rainfall of fifteen feet in the space of forty days and nights, like the early Deluge, would produce a flood transcending our imagination. And this one threatens to be even worse. . . .”

“I do bring a Flood of waters on the Earth’—Genesis, sixth chapter, seventeenth verse,” murmured the Mongolian, closing his eyes.

“Yeah,, and what do *we* do?” Hoyle shouted.

“We sit in this blasted hole and get trapped!” cried somebody else.

“No,” Val said slowly. “We do what Noah did—and build an Ark!”

He was conscious of a passing surprise at his own declaration. He had not even thought of the notion a moment before; now it seemed so logical and obvious.

“This ain’t the time to get funny, Val!” Hoyle yelled.

“I mean it,” Val cried earnestly. “We’re building edifices, aren’t we? What’s to prevent us building an edifice as an Ark instead of a building? That’s it!” he went on keenly. “The buildings are all long, beetling ones, able to hold about five hundred people when empty.

We’ll go on building, sure—but we’ll make the edifice movable and able to float when the water comes. Nobody—not even Ox—will notice the difference. Outwardly there won’t *be* a difference!”

“Say, he’s got something there. . . .”

“It can’t miss. . . .”

“You have a wise friend among you,” Kang observed calmly, opening his eyes again. “Heed him. He has the spirit and the energy of a leader. . . .”

The grim-faced men nodded resolutely. Val looked at them earnestly in turn, read loyalty to him—until he came to the face of Bilworthy. As Val’s keen eyed gaze fell upon him Bilworthy turned and shambled off towards his crude bed. Val’s hand dropped on his shoulder.

“Just a minute, Bilworthy!” Val swung the man round. “You squealed on me last time to Ox. I let it pass that time. But if you repeat one word of what’s gone on in here tonight I’ll get you. Understand?”

“Now why should I—” Bilworthy began to bluster.

“Understand?” Val repeated ominously.

“Yes—yes, I understand.” Bilworthy turned away, scowling. Then the door opened and the guard came in vigorously.

“Lights out, you scum! Step on it, there! Line up for search!”

WHEN, some weeks later, the world-wrapping mists began to rise and there came reports of abating volcanic eruption, Kronheim began to breathe a little more freely . . . but not for long.

With Angorstine he decided to investigate for himself the lack of fresh orders from European headquarters. And it was the airplane trip that rammed home the appalling truth into his brain.

The Atlantic Ocean had dropped tre-

mendously in its level. Here and there ships were nosing through channels foreign to maritime knowledge. In other places vessels had broken their backs or lay beached and forlorn with their sides rusting. The British Isles, still filled with hurrying, desperate people in the war-cracked cities, were perched up like mountain tops a thousand feet or so above sea level. Cliffs never seen before had come to light.

Europe provided its own explanation for lack of orders from G.H.Q. One half of the great European plain from mid-Russia to mid-Germany was nothing but a lava field, hardened now, from which poked the shattered remnants of buildings. People, in little bunches, were gathered around crude camps before smoky fires. It was a glimpse of a primitive age. Civilization in Europe was ended.

Dazed, too stunned to understand the portent of it all, Kronheim had the plane pilot continue the trip. By de-grees the whole globe was circum-navigated and the tale of tragedy unre-eled. Everywhere there seemed to be either lava-fields, dried up rivers, or depleted oceans. Shipping was obviously doomed. Parts of the air were thick with either battering tempests or poisonous volcanic fumes. And occasionally through the driving reek there was a vision of a gray belt girdling the heavens.

Very much sobered Kronheim returned to his American headquarters, still the same brick building atop the small hill overlooking the New York labor camps.

"Angorstine," he said slowly, "there is only one leader left in the Cause—and that is me. The others are dead. Obviously it is necessary to plan the world afresh with you and me at the head of it. We can master the few survivors with ease. We can make the scum in these American labor camps

build as they never built before. That is what we will do! Fate has destroyed my superiors and made me the master of the world."

Angorstine did not answer. He was looking out of the window onto the gray band across the heaven.

"Wonder what that is?" he mused.

Kronheim gave an impatient retort. "Stop wasting time on trifles and summon the guard. I've new regulations to put into force. Buildings must be hurried in construction. Several lots of workers must be drafted overseas to begin work there. We must make arrangements to conserve water. It's becoming a problem."

"Maybe Turner could explain that gray band," Angorstine said. "You never summoned him again after ordering that flogging."

"No use. He's too stubborn. Besides there are more important matters. . . . Get a move on, man!"

THAT Kronheim had become undisputed master of the world made little impression on the prisoners in the camps. Things could not get much worse, anyway. Water was rationed, and precious little there was of it. Food was usually dry bread interspersed with vegetable concoctions from the fast dying fields of the Americas. Whatever worthwhile there was left in the eating line found its way to Kronheim and Angorstine.

Despite the privations, Val and his colleagues worked on steadily, keeping their eyes on that gray band that daily became larger in the sky. Otherwise the sky was rainless, blue, and sunny. Only that gray arc of slowly returning vapor revealed what was coming. Val wondered if Rita was watching it too. Communication with her was difficult these days. At least she was still alive; he knew that much. She knew, too, that an Ark was intended.

Carrying out the plan they had arranged Val and his co-workers constructed one of the new buildings to their own plan, providing it with a keel and watertight floor, and apparently nobody was any the wiser. The guards had no reason to suspect anything phony. . . . The hardest thing of all to bear was the lack of water.

WORKING ten hours a day in grueling sunshine and dust with lips cracked and muscles aching told on the strongest constitution. But Ox allowed no let-up. He had permitted himself only the same ration as his prisoners, regarding the camp in the light of a beleaguered fortress. He was always at his post, legs apart and hands on hips, intent on every aspect of his duty.

A grinding, merciless month slipped by. In that time the gray band in the sky had crept nearer and nearer, drawn by the cooling Earth. . . . Landscapes, lava caked and hard now, were wilted with sunshine. Underneath them lay buried fields and pastureland, gone probably forever. . . . Even Kronheim was wondering if he could ever establish a new empire out of this cracked, battered wilderness of his own making, from which rain seemed to have eternally departed. . . . The dispatchments of prisoners he had sent overseas were dying, said reports—dying of thirst or else starvation. Others had been preyed upon by the cannibalistic survivors of the eruptions in Mid-Europe.

Only those in Camp 4 knew what was really coming and it gave them cause enough to smile through their flaked lips. Water! There'd be more than enough before they were through! Water aplenty, and Building No. 7 all ready to float. All it needed now was a thorough examination for being watertight, and provisioning. These two were big problems.

At intervals, when opportunity

looked favorable, Val slipped out to pass on the news to his wife. On one of the nights he was followed by the shadowy figure of Bilworthy. But Bilworthy went in the opposite direction, licking his parched lips as he went.

At length he reached the door of Ox's guard room and knocked softly.

"Well, what in hell do you want?"

Ox stood glaring down, his great figure silhouetted by the oil light behind him. Power, relying on water, had ended long since.

"I've—I've something more to tell you, Ox. It's worth a can of water. That's all I ask." Bilworthy stood sliming his paws down his overalls.

"You get your ration," Ox replied brutally. "We all get half a pint a day—no more, no less. . . ." He seemed to ponder then suddenly shooting out his arm he yanked the scrawny little prisoner up the steps and hurled him into the guard room.

"Go on," he invited calmly, his blue eyes slitting.

"It's—it's about that prisoner Turner," Bilworthy panted, fingering his lips nervously. "He's—he's plotting treason again. This time he's building an—an Ark."

"A what?" Ox cried.

"An Ark—like the one in the Bible. There's a Deluge coming. The seas are going to cause a flood. That gray band in the sky. . . ."

"Go on," Ox said ominously. "Every detail. . . ."

By degrees, his voice hoarse with dryness, Bilworthy got out every part of the story, including the scientific implications. At the end of it Ox calmly put on his coat, drew on his shiny boots, then pointed to the door.

"Outside! Show me this Ark— Go on, damn you!"

Bilworthy looked longingly at the water tank. "A-about my water, Captain—"

"That you'll get later. I want to be sure first. Now move!"

Ox kept a grip on Bilworthy's collar as he marched him across the camp grounds and out to the building site. When they came to building No. 7 Ox marched inside and flashed on his torch. Twenty minutes of minute examination convinced him. He came out and stood thinking.

"I—I was right, wasn't I?" Bilworthy urged, clutching him. "Room enough in there for nearly five hundred people. It'll float—"

"I've got eyes of my own," Ox broke in. He turned and blew his whistle violently. After a while hastily dressed guards came running up in the starlight.

"Summon every prisoner here!" Ox roared. "Hurry up!"

THERE was an immediate scurrying and blowing of whistles. Ox stood waiting with his feet apart as the men in their coarse night shirts came stumbling along in bare feet, finally formed into a rough column. Val, his lips set into a taut line, stood gazing at Bilworthy's cringing form.

"Men," Ox said slowly, unfastening his whip from his belt and flexing it in his strong hands, "I pride myself I have treated you with the justice of a soldier while I've been here. Right?"

Heads nodded promptly.

"I'm a hard man . . ." Ox walked slowly along the line. "But that is because I obey orders to the letter. There is a code of honor among true soldiers, even as there is among prisoners and workers. Right here is a man who tries to sell all of you for a can of water!"

Ox spat in the dust at Bilworthy's feet. Bilworthy stared for a moment, then his face was suddenly sweating.

"But Captain, you promised me—"

"Yes, I promised you water. You'll get it—but it won't be any good to you!

You're a rat, Bilworthy! You squealed once. You have squealed again to try and get more than your share! To try and get more than the prisoners and more than the guards!"

"So he told you about the Ark, eh?" Val asked grimly.

"About the Ark and about the Deluge. I'll deal with that later." Ox moved forward slowly. "As for you, Bilworthy, I've one punishment for swine who try to get more than they're entitled to."

He stopped playing with his whip abruptly and whirled it round. The biting thongs flayed the torn night-shirt from Bilworthy's back. He fell in the dust, howling.

"Water!" he screeched. "That's all I wanted! Water!"

"A can full," Ox agreed, and his whip split the silence again. "Salty, stinking water—the sweat of your own filthy hide as you crawl from this lash. Go on, crawl, blast you! *Crawl!*"

Time and again the lash came round with pistol shot force. The prisoners stood motionless, sweating themselves, wincing at each swing of that mighty arm. Groaning, dragging himself in the dust, Bilworthy crawled into a corner by the Ark building. Ox stopped at that, ground the moistured drops of Bilworthy under the heel of his jackboot.

"Would anybody like to say something?" he asked dryly, breathing hard.

"Yes, Ox," Val replied briefly. "You're a damned sadist—but you're a man of discipline. I'll say that for you."

The starlight caught the gleam of Ox's teeth. Then his jaws clamped shut again and he motioned to the Ark building.

"I'm not reporting this because it is the only thing you could think up to save us from the coming Deluge," he announced curtly. "I am not reporting

it—yet. You're going to finish it properly first, make a thorough job of it. You're going to fit steering, provision it, give it paddle power which you mugs can provide by physical labor. Because you decided to build it you will be allowed to travel in it—at a price, and it's to the credit of your damnable souls that you'll save the Master of us all from the Flood when it comes."

"You mean Kronheim comes in it, too?" Val shouted.

"He is the master, and he comes—with Angorstine," Ox snapped. "He is still the ruler. You found the way out and we'll sail under Kronheim when the skies open. You'll finish this Ark under my control. Ten hours a day—no more, no less. Now dismiss!"

Val hesitated, his fists clenched—then the small hand of Kang caught his arm. He whispered.

"Do as he says, my friend. He is only obeying his highest sense of duty. No man, whatever his beliefs, can do more."

"But *Kronheim*—!" Val was aghast.

"Move!" Ox bellowed. "You, too!" He caught up the blood-spattered Bilworthy and hurled him into the line. "One, two, quick march! Never mind the pebbles. Think yourselves lucky you've feet at all. One, two . . ." His polished boots flashed out smartly.

CHAPTER VI

DELUGE

THE next day the sun was obscured for the first time and the whole of the sky looked like a great inverted bowl of gray lowering down to earth.

Eased a little by the lack of sunshine but still physically weary to the breaking point Val and the others went to

work exclusively on the Ark. Most of the men were bitter, loathe to accept the counsel of the little Mongolian who seemed to see some sort of virtue in the straddle-legged giant in the shiny boots who tirelessly watched over them.

Obeying his orders, a system of paddles was devised and seats were fixed inside the Ark building for the hapless ones who were to wield the oars. Somehow, the arrangement savored galley-slaving. Rough beds were made too, and chairs. There were movable stands for oil lamps, so they would stand upright under all circumstances. Floodlights, to act as searchlights, operating on batteries, were installed. Among a multitude of other things, the interior of the Ark was partitioned: it was evident Ox had possible women survivors in his mind.

Four days passed, in which Kronheim tried to figure out ways and means of saving his crumbling Empire. Unofficial reports had reached him from long distance fliers that Europe was experiencing rain. It made him smile and feel more comfortable. Once the problem of water was overcome he could soon tighten his grip again.

Over America the clouds lowered all through the intervening days and at every camp the prisoners were working in twilight gloom. Then as they knocked off in the evening of the fourth day little spots of moisture started dropping on their barely covered backs and spattered in the dust.

"Rain!" one of the men shrieked. "*Rain!*" He stood with his face upturned to the black sky, mouth open to catch the drops. Then Ox's mighty fist hurled him back into the line.

"Keep marching, you! You'll get your bellyful later! March!"

Spots of wet mud marred Ox's immaculate boots as he herded the line back to camp. Once there he stood with arms akimbo appraising the black-

ness overhead. Turning presently he saw Val gazing up, too.

"Looks like you were right, Turner," he said cryptically. "Get inside."

Within the long building Val was immediately met with a barrage of questions. The presence of the guards was ignored. For that matter they were as interested as the prisoners in impending events.

"Is it coming, Val?" shouted Hoyle. "Is it the Deluge?"

"Yes, my friends, the Deluge," observed Kang quietly from his corner stool. "The last hours of a phase of brutal power domination are here. Be assured that we shall find safety."

"Wish I could be sure of that bit, Kang," Val said anxiously, as the pattering rain increased to a sudden fierce drumming on the tin roof. "This has been gathering for weeks. Seas and rivers are returning . . ."

"Hey, you men!" Ox stood in the doorway again with water trickling down his chin. "Outside and drink your fill, the whole perishing lot of you! Some of the holes have filled up . . . Step on it!"

He cracked his whip to hurry the scramble outside. As Bilworthy came scurrying past he delivered a terrific kick that sent the little man crashing on his face in the mud outside. He got up, elbowed an elderly prisoner out of the way from the nearest hole and drove his face into the pool.

Something blazed through the dark—the explosion of Ox's gun. Bilworthy relaxed, his head sunk in the water.

For a moment there was silence. Ox came slowly down the dripping steps, lifted Bilworthy's corpse out of the pool and threw it on one side as though it were a wet sack. He motioned to the trembling old man.

"Go on, you—drink—" Ox looked up and bawled, "I'll have every man here drink his fill—no more, no less.

And hurry it up!" he added urgently as the rain increased in force and drummed a hazy margin onto his hat and massive shoulders.

At last the men were satisfied and came stumbling through the blinding torrent back into the camp. Ox followed them, surveyed their dripping forms for a moment, then said curtly.

"No man moves out of here to that Ark until I give the order. Understand?" He went out and slammed the door.

THOUGH the guards gave the usual "lights out" order the men were all out of their beds again immediately, gathering together in a circle and listening to the savage beating of the rain upon the roof. With every passing minute it seemed to increase its force. A slight wind had risen too, driving the blinding sheets against the windows. Outside it was swilling along the ground, dimly illumined by the battery driven lamps at various points.

"Why the devil do we have to wait for Ox's orders?" shouted Hoyle. "I say let's get to the Ark and done with it!"

"He's right, Val."

"What are we waitin' for?"

"Now just a minute, boys—" Val started to say, then he paused and looked up sharply as a new sound came above the rain. It was a roar like the coming of a mighty wind. The ground under the camp began to tremble: the downpour increased its drumming to a sudden shattering rattle.

"The Deluge! It's coming!" screamed somebody.

"Cloudburst somewhere," Val acknowledged quickly. "Come on—Outside!"

The men nearest the door tore it open and raced down the wooden steps. Out in the open air the roaring din sounded like a tempest-driven ocean smashing

against distant cliffs . . . Then suddenly it was upon them. It came out of the moaning dark, a vast roaring tide of water vomited from the crumbling vapor heavens. Instantly a Niagara smashed into the midst of the camp, hurling the men over, tearing down fences, crushing in the tin huts like empty meat cans.

Val, caught in the raging tide, was slammed back into the crumbling camp. Water, cold and scum-laden, surged over his head. He came up gasping to find himself struggling amidst fallen timbers and wreckage.

"Help—please!" came a gasp from nearby. "Help!"

He struck out just in time to yank up a frantically struggling figure from under a heavy beam. It was Kang. The voice alone revealed it: to see anything was almost impossible.

"Th—thank you, my friend," the Mongolian gasped. "You—you don't know what you have done by saving me."

"Saved your life, I guess," Val panted back. He looked anxiously in the raging dark. Above the noise of bubbling water and whistle of descending rain was another sound—yelling voices of men and women. Rita! He had forgotten her.

"My wife!" he shouted frantically. "I've got to find her! Here, Kang, hang onto this."

"The Ark!" Kang interrupted him. "Look—the lights of the Ark. Accept my suggestion and head for the Ark before looking for your wife. It will be simpler. It has searchlights, remember."

"Yes." Val frowned momentarily. "Yes, maybe you're right."

He began to swim strongly towards the bobbing lights of the monster as it floated on the tumbling water. Kang he dragged along beside him. It seemed obvious to Val that some of

the men must have reached the Ark at a remarkable speed to get it under way so quickly. Its searchlights were blazing across the water now, picking out survivors. Everywhere there seemed to be bobbing heads and flailing arms. Men and women alike were battling desperately to reach the floating sanctuary.

It drew nearer, and the searchlights reflecting back from the water revealed a surprising sight. A giant figure stood in the main doorway, legs apart and revolver in hand, water pouring down his bristly head.

"Women first, I said!" he roared, crashing his fist into the jaw of a man as he strove to reach the doorway. "Get back and help the women, you damned skunk! Drag 'em aboard! Lively now!"

He kept his feet with difficulty and watched like an eagle as the men in the water worked desperately to lift up the women prisoners as they floated near enough.

"Ox," Val panted. "He got there first. I never could figure if he was man or monster: now I know he's got a spark of humanity somewhere under the armor-plate. Hey, Ox!"

Ox swung round at the shout. "Come in here before the women at your own peril!" he roared.

"Not me. What about Kang, here? He's sinking . . ."

"O.K.—up with him!" Ox reached down and yanked the little Mongolian upwards. He stumbled into the Ark's lighted interior.

"That doesn't go for you, Turner," Ox shouted. "You've got plenty of muscle. Lend a hand with the women."

"You seem to have gotten yourself into a safe position, Ox!" one of the swimming men shouted sarcastically.

"One more crack from you and I'll drill you!" Ox retorted. "I got here

first to insure discipline! That was my duty. I saw the Flood coming and got things ready while you mugs were wondering what to do. Now it's the women first. No time to lose!" he finished with a bellow as another vast rolling wave of water came thundering down on top of the first.

Val came up again gasping for air. This time all trace of the camp had gone. The world was a battering, roaring hell of rain, wind, and struggling bodies. The Ark still bobbed up and down, its portholes like watching eyes.

Time and again Val caught a struggling woman prisoner and lifted her to the door where Ox seized her quickly. Until at last Val grabbed the one woman he wanted most in the world—Rita, nearly at the point of exhaustion. With more care than before he raised her limp body.

"Easy with her," he called up anxiously.

Ox dropped her inside. "What's one more more than another?" he asked sourly. "Because she's your wife doesn't make her extra special. Keep working!"

Val smiled twistedly. He toiled on again, until at last it seemed that all the women who had survived the Flood were aboard.

"O. K., you men," Ox shouted, and stood aside without lending a hand's turn as the men floundered up onto the steel flooring into the light and warmth. Val was the last. He stood up, dripping water and breathing hard.

Ox, his soaked uniform plastered to his mighty body, flipped his gun across to the silent Kang.

"Kang, I nominate you as my deputy for the time being," he said briefly. "Guess you've got more sense than all these other boneheads put together. See to it that nobody starts the Ark moving until I get back . . ." He paused and glared around, hands on

hips. "I want a man with strong muscles and no fear to come with me," he snapped out. "I want a volunteer."

"What for?" Val inquired.

For answer Ox pointed through the driving rain. "See that solitary light over there? Well, that's headquarters on the rising ground overlooking the camp. Kronheim and Angorstine, my superiors, are there. It is my duty to get them and the Ark cannot get that close. It will take me and another strong man." Ox paused, a sneering grin on his face. "I know only one strong man here," he said significantly.

Val said coldly, "Kronheim and Angorstine caused all this between them. They can perish in it."

"Whatever the causes I've my duty to do," Ox retorted. "I swore allegiance to a regime until the end. . . . I want a man," he finished bitterly. "Maybe I got it wrong, Val Turner, but I always figured you were a man."

Val hesitated, then he caught a glimpse of the slowly nodding head of Kang.

"All right," Val said briefly, and tearing off what remained of his shirt he dived into the boiling scum outside. In another moment, likewise stripped to the waist, Ox followed him. They swam powerfully, neither of them speaking, covering the mile of roaring waters and blinding rain in fairly good time, stumbling at last up the sloping sides of the slowly vanishing island on which the headquarters building was situated.

HARDLY had they both floundered through the doorway before Kronheim came rushing to meet them with Angorstine beside him. Both of them were white and shaken.

"The Deluge," Kronheim panted. "It's the Deluge, isn't it?"

"Yes sir!" Ox saluted smartly. "If you can swim, there is safety a mile

away. If you cannot swim I'll help you."

"Why the devil didn't you bring a boat?" Kronheim shouted.

"Impossible, sir—sorry. Prisoner Turner and I will help you."

"You?" Kronheim turned slowly to face the grim-faced Val. "All you want is an excuse to drown me, I guess. . . ."

"I leave it to others to kill in cold blood, Kronheim," Val said coldly.

Ox became suddenly urgent. "We've got to hurry, sir—"

"I'll start right now," Angorstine interrupted, tearing off his coat. "I can swim. . . ." He leapt for the door and prepared to dive, but Ox swung around and caught his arm. With a terrific upercut he sent Angorstine reeling. He lost his balance, pitched into the roaring tide, and vanished.

"That was murder!" Kronheim screamed. "You drowned him!"

"Not murder, sir," Ox corrected briefly. "He tried to seek safety before his superior. That was treason. Treason is punishable by death. I simply did my duty."

Kronheim stared blankly for a moment and swallowed something. Val remained silent, inwardly admiring Ox's notions on discipline. Then Kronheim seemed to make up his mind. He tore off his coat and lowered himself nervously into the water. Immediately Ox was on one side of him and Val on the other. Between them they got the shouting, raving dictator of a ruined world across that mile of thundering tempest, pushed him up at last into the Ark where he lay gasping heavily on the floor.

Ox turned and slammed the doors, snatched the gun from Kang and whirled around to face the grim faced people.

"Remember this!" he barked. "You too, Turner. Kronheim is still our master. I am his *aide* now and will follow

out his orders to the letter. When the waters subside the regime will continue and as long as Kronheim lives we obey him. Understand?"

"With him shut up in here with us?" roared Hoyle. "Like hell! He'll never live to see the waters subside, Ox. Somehow we'll get him—and you!"

Ox's eyes narrowed. "The slightest attempt on the master or on myself, by man or woman, will be answered with death," he said slowly. "Let that sink into all your skulls. . . . Now you men get to those oars and start rowing. You, Benson, get to the steering gear. You others pull the partitions over. Men in one end, women in the other. Step on it! Get yourselves dried! You keep them quiet, Turner—I hold you responsible."

Val nodded slowly. "I'll do my best, Ox. I'll take orders from a man anytime. . . ." He looked sourly at Kronheim's big, dripping form, then turned away to get things to order.

THANKS to the prescience of Ox in forcing the prisoners to equip the Ark beforehand as fully as possible, there was no shortage of necessities, but just the same he rationed everything and for the first time in his life Kronheim was obliged to accept the rations with good grace. He was changed too. He was in danger of his life every hour and knew it, despite the relentless guard Ox maintained.

Val for his part was pretty sure after a while that the people would leave Kronheim unmolested as long as he kept quiet. But that they would ever again consent to his rulership was a debatable point. In fact not even that. There was only one answer to the idea. . . . Refusal.

MUCH of his spare time Val spent with Rita. Through the portholes of the Ark as it was rowed onwards day by day by relays of men, visible in the

dim daylight which filtered through lowering clouds, there was nothing but a waste of water. It would have required a world trip to grasp the full extent of the catastrophe. The heavens in their disgorge of waters had refilled the seas and hammered their unimaginable weight and volume into the land as well. Coasts had eroded, hills slipped down, ravines burst asunder under mighty cataracts. And not even yet was the Deluge finished with. The clouds were so low they nearly touched the surface of the water. There was wind too, an incessant moaning gale which howled dismally over the gray waste.

"I wonder," Rita said thoughtfully, towards the close of the fifth day, "where we are going to end this drifting?"

It was Kronheim who answered her. "Where we started," he said curtly. "I gave orders for us to move constantly in a circle so we might still be in America when the waters go down." He glared across at the helmsman and steadily rowing oarsmen on their seats. "That's what you have done, isn't it?"

The helmsman in particular looked uncomfortable.

"Answer, damn you!" roared Ox.

To everybody's surprise it was Kang who spoke next, in his quiet modulated voice.

"Perhaps I can answer for him. He is obeying *my* orders for a course—not yours, Leader Kronheim."

There was an astounded silence.

"What?" Ox rumbled. "You *dared!* You dared to give orders above Kronheim, the leader? By God Kang, that's treason, and I—"

"It is not treason when I was concerned for the safety of everybody in this Ark, my well-disciplined friend," Kang said. He turned and looked around on the others, then resumed, "Perhaps this is as good a time as any

to explain one or two things. . . ."

"What things?" Ox demanded.

"Patience, Captain, while I tell you. . . . In the first place, I did not arrive in Camp 4 by accident. I was—or rather am—one of a hundred representatives sent from Tibet to gather together the few survivors of the Deluge. We of Tibet have led a sheltered life of scientific achievement for many generations. We knew of but were not concerned by the wars of the outer world. Until we realized that war had resulted in the domination by force of the whole earth. That might ultimately present a danger to us. . . . But far more than that were we aware that from the action of the Mane bombs and consequent evaporation of Earth's moisture, that a Deluge was imminent. Our geographical prognosticators showed that all Tibet, and our sheltered kingdom included, would be inundated completely by the Deluge to come. . . .

"It was clear to us that nearly the whole of the world's inhabitants would be destroyed in the approaching cataclysm, but it might be possible to save a few—a few who could at least rebuild a better civilization with our assistance. We had no wish to live in the world alone: indeed such an occurrence would be detrimental since the human race might thus die out completely. *Some* had got to be saved and brought to safety until the floods should subside. So one hundred of us were chosen and sent out into the countries of the world to save those whom we considered worthy."

Kang gave his wise old smile. "You, Turner, thought your idea of an Ark was spontaneous. It was not. I willed the idea to you by telepathy. Remarkably simple art once mastered. You found a means of making an Ark so easily it astonished you. In other parts of the world my fellows would give the same order for Arks and they, too,

would be built — perhaps not in the same way, but they would be built just the same."

"You—you mean there are other Arks drifting about the world somewhere?" Val asked in amazement.

"Another ninety-nine, I hope — all drifting to one spot. A hundred Arks all told containing the nucleus of a new civilization."

"And yet Tibet is under water?" Kronheim sneered. "Not very effectual, my friend, is it?"

KANG turned to him. "Tibet is under water, yes, but not our civilization and scientific secrets. Tibet is within easy reach of Everest, the highest point in the world. We have complete knowledge of how to scale that mountain, know every inch of its surface. Once we knew the Deluge was coming we removed everything to a high point of Everest and utilized its natural caves as a temporary habitat. In there, shut out from the winds and waters, lies the oldest and the newest science in the world—Tibetan science! Upon it you can build a better empire once the waters have receded, an empire the better for knowing that the rule of force has vanished forever from the Earth."

"Then you have been instructing this helmsman to drive towards Everest all the time?" Ox demanded. "To India?"

"To the second Ararat," Kang conceded quietly.

"You shan't do it!" Kronheim shouted, leaping to his feet. "I am still the master! There can be no new regime so long as I rule—and rule I shall, until the end! I'll break you, Kang, and your science—just as I have broken everything else that stood in my way."

"Except your neck," growled Val.

The Mongolian was undisturbed. "The fly does not hurt the elephant no matter how hard it kicks," he mur-

mured. "You are the last of a regime that will soon lie rotting under the waters."

"You forget me," Ox said grimly. "I swore allegiance, and I have been—and still am—true to it!"

"For that all praise is due, my friend," Kang smiled. "For the regime you worship you are to be pitied—deeply pitied. What is left of it beyond this warped, blustering specimen of useless vanity? You, Kronheim, will not stand one second against the might of Tibetan science. A man who could not even foresee the tragedy of the Mane bombs is foresworn to destruction."

Kronheim sat down again slowly. There was a certain unshakeable calm about Kang, a conviction of infinite power. Without haste, without even a raised word, he had given an extraordinary promise.

"In other words," Kronheim said at last, "I am being considered as ruler while we are on this Ark—only to be destroyed by your science when we reach this Everest Ararat?"

Kang said, "We do not take life, Kronheim. We are not murderers. We are not even avengers. You will enter with us to live your life quietly as long as your conscience will permit you. But you will no longer rule: be assured of that!"

Ox opened his mouth to speak, then he closed it again. Kronheim was staring in front of him as the full weight of Kang's words sank in. By slow degrees the assembled people, Kronheim included, began to see what Kang proposed for the destroyer of a world. He proposed freedom—freedom in which to grapple with his own mind, freedom to remember but with power no longer in his grasp. A snake without its sting. It was calm, sober retribution—but it had the flavor of Eastern inhumanity.

FOR five more days the Ark traveled onwards under the power of the oars, carried too by tremendous wind force. The rain continued. Hardly anybody slept during the period. They were mainly at the ports staring out over the watery waste or else talking among themselves. Now and again they caught glimpses of distant lights bobbing on the waves—lights that could only belong to other Arks all moving to a common goal.

Until at last, days later, something loomed out of the drab, rainlashed grayness perhaps three miles ahead. It was a titanic rocky spire, a mountain pushing up into the girdling clouds. There was an immediate rush to the window to study it.

"Everest!" shouted somebody.

"No!" Kang said quietly. "A mountain of the lower Himalayas. Everest is . . . *there!*"

AT that moment the Ark turned slightly and the astounding vision burst full upon the sight. For a moment the raging rain thinned a little and the awe inspiring mass of Mount Everest itself loomed on the sight, rearing to infinity with waters plowing and churning round its invincible mass. Here and there were the bobbing lights of other Arks.

"You shan't do it!" Kronheim shouted suddenly. "You shan't take me there, Kang! You shan't take me to be looked at, to be pointed to as a specimen. I am still the master! I *will* continue . . ."

He broke off and picked up a chair, whirled it around in an arc towards the little scientist. But half way in its journey the chair dropped as Kang's calm eyes met the inflamed ones of Kronheim. Kronheim fell slowly back towards the wall, pulling at his lips. That calm, inexorable stare followed him.

"Not there . . ." Kronheim whispered, drooling. "Not there . . ."

"Leader! What is the matter?" Ox caught him fiercely, forced him to stand up straight. "Leader, what's wrong? Command me! I am still here to obey! I will force these scum . . ."

Kronheim looked at Ox stupidly. "Bombs . . . Send in Dr. Mane. We'll sink 'em deep down, Standish Deep down! Standish! Where the hell's Standish? *Stan-dish!*"

"Easy, leader . . . easy," Ox panted, staring fixedly at the trickle of saliva running from Kronheim's undisciplined lips.

Rita turned away, sickened. Val caught her head on his shoulder, watched in fascinated interest. He turned suddenly to Kang.

"Kang, did you . . .?" he whispered, amazed.

The Mongolian only smiled . . . but it was a calm, cruel smile. It seemed to verify Val's belief that the scientist had used his superior mind to snap once and for all the reason of the dictator.

"Where's Standish?" Kronheim repeated presently, gazing unseeingly at Ox. "Where—where is he? It's—it's so dark in here . . ."

"For God's sake somebody, knock him out!" screamed Hoyle. "He's gone nuts."

Ox shook himself as though ridding himself of a vast unbelief. Very quietly he tugged out his gun, leveled it, then fired. He stood watching as Kronheim's gross body sank slowly to the floor and lay still.

The silence on the assembly was complete. Only the howling wind made any noise at all. Everybody watched, motionless, as Ox lifted the dead dictator on his broad shoulder and carried it to the rear window. He forced the frame open, eased the corpse outside, and dropped it onto the waste of waters. Then he turned back,

clicked his heels together, and gave a final salute. He fired one shot of his gun into the air, then laid the weapon carefully on a side table.

He turned, his face like granite. "The regime I obeyed is ended," he announced cryptically. "I swore my allegiance until death. The good soldier knows when it is his duty to surrender."

Then before anybody could grasp his intention he turned back to the window, wriggled through it, and was gone. The glass slammed shut, but by the time everybody had rushed to it the

waste of water outside was dark and empty.

"He—he killed himself," Val whispered. "The poor, duty-crazed fool!"

"No—a good soldier," Kang said quietly. He stood thinking for a moment, then with a shrug he turned and pointed to the gleaming mountain ramparts coming ever nearer.

"There is the foundation of a new world," he said slowly. "The foundation of a world in which all men, as one of your great American statesmen once said, shall be free and equal."

The End

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THE THOUGHT MACHINE

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Coming of the Giant Germs," etc.

BUTCH CONNERS, with Red and Willie at his elbow, crouched in the alley peering through the window into the dim eerie laboratory. The two men in there were standing before a weird-looking apparatus that glistened blue-green in the light.

"Where's the safe?" Willie murmured.

The safe of the wealthy Dr. Jenks didn't seem to be here; or if it was Conners couldn't see it. The window was up a little at the bottom; the voices of the two men inside were audible.

"I call it a Thought-machine," Dr. Jenks was saying. "I've been working on it many years, and it's perfected now—just tonight. There's nothing new, as you know, John, in the scientific theory that thought is actually a tangible vibration. Infinitely tiny, infinitely rapid vibration of the ether, perhaps. That idea was scientifically postulated, back around 1900."

"To account for thought-transference," the other man said. "Someone whose brain happens to be a receiving station for your own particular thought-vibrations—"

"Exactly," Dr. Jenks said warmly. "But I haven't been working on that angle of it. I am convinced, John, that somewhere—call it in a Fourth Dimension if you like—there exists what might be termed a Realm of Unthought Things. A vast storehouse of energy—mental energy. A realm co-existing with ours—unperceived by us because it has a different basic vibration-rate. The great Creator's storehouse. We



"Duck! They're gonna let us have it!"

The Realm of Unthought Things, was Dr. Jenks' goal with his Thought-Machine, but all Butch and Red and Willie wanted from it was a million bucks!

fatuous humans believe that when we think a thing out—solve some knotty problem—devise something new—discover something—invent a new process or machine—we believe, John, that we have created something. What nonsense! Everything has been created by Omnipotence. All we are doing, scientifically, is sending our questing vibrations of thought out into what, to us, is the Unknown. They reach that realm—that storehouse—derive a new energy there. And come back to us, amplified, and our brain receives them, translates them into what we call Knowledge. We have brought something out of the Realm of Unthought Things—”

“The place where everything is waiting to be thought of,” the other man murmured with awe. “If only you could prove—”

“I have, John. A year ago, I saw it. My little apparatus—it was so delicate that its own energy burned it up in a moment. But I caught the radiations of that storehouse. They bathe our realm constantly. They stimulate our brains—our quest for knowledge, we call it. But, scientifically, it’s only the physical impact of vibrations against our brain—stimulating our own thought-waves. I made those incoming vibrations visible, for just an instant, John—as one makes visible the bombardment of a cathode-ray tube, to get a television image. I saw the realm of Unthought Things! And now this machine I’ve just finished will take me there!”

In the alley outside the laboratory window, Willie murmured impatiently, “Butch, listen, I don’t see no safe in there. Hadn’t we better—”

CONNERS silenced him with a muttered oath. By what these men were saying, that Thought-machine might be pretty valuable—more valuable than what was supposed to be in

Dr. Jenks’ safe. And then a weird idea came to the squat, beetle-browed Butch Conners. It was so weird it gave him the creeps. But he clung to it because it might be possible. My Gawd what a stake to play for! A million dollars? Why, that would be nothing compared to what they could rake in if they pulled off a stunt like this! . . .

Within the laboratory, with the lurid blue-green sheen of light glistening on the weird little apparatus, the two men went on talking. Dr. Jenks was explaining to his friend now how the Thought-machine worked. So simple. Conners, with the lanky young Red and the weazel-faced little Willie beside him, listened intently, eagerly, to what the men inside were saying. So simple to work; Conners was memorizing it now. My Gawd what a haul they’d make! . . .

Luck is a wonderful thing. Conners had always had it; and it stayed with him now. Within half an hour—it was midnight now—Dr. Jenks and his friend left the laboratory; within another hour they planned to use the little Thought-machine, starting upon their weird trip.

“Now’s our chance,” Conners whispered. “Red, stand down there at the end of the alley. Get inside, Willie—hand that damned thing out to me.”

In every job it was the agile Willie who went up the waterpipe or through the window. He handed out the Thought-machine silently and skillfully. Red made sure that nobody saw them as they hoisted it over the alley wall, and ran to their parked car at the edge of the empty lot.

“Well, we got it,” Red said dubiously. “What in the hell will we do with it? You think Sam’ll pay anything for it? Listen, there ain’t a fence in the city who’ll touch that fool thing with a ten foot pole. If there ever was a piece of hot goods—”

They were safely in Conner's lodging house room.

"We're not gonna sell it," Conners declared. "Not for a million. Now listen, you mugs—"

Patiently, he explained. The Realm of Unthought Things. Where it was, Conners had no very clear idea. But it was a hidden place, somewhere near here because Dr. Jenks had said this machine would take you to it in what would seem maybe only half an hour. A place where unthought things were hidden. Things like the world's first locomotive, for instance. That had been there and it was here now.

"Listen," Conners was saying earnestly, "maybe you don't get the science of this, but it's simple enough. In this Realm of Unthought Things all the great inventions of the future are lyin' stored. Any one of 'em's worth a million bucks."

"Inventions—such as what?" Willie demanded.

Conners gave him a withering look. "Don't be an idiot. They haven't been thought of yet. How can I describe 'em to you?"

"I get you," the lanky Red put in. "We go there an' get 'em an' bring 'em back—and sell 'em."

It was an amazing idea, but how simple, once you thought of it. "You see," Conners explained, "like he said, this here Thought-machine bathes you in its rays—vibrations or somethin'. Then you get changed, and you go there an' the machine goes with you."

ALL the intricacies of science, no doubt, might be reduced like that to naked essentials. Dr. Jenks had talked, with considerable detail, concerning the transmutation of the human body atoms—and the atoms of the Thought-machine itself—into a different state of matter. The scientific state, of which thoughts are composed.

We call the state, mental—because it is different from what we know as physical. But it has an existence; as tangible as our physical world, to do anything of its own vibration-rate.

Dr. Jenks expounded with a wealth of inconvertible detail—but all Butch Conners got was the naked, practical fact that here was some place to which you could go, get something valuable and bring it back. (Most of us accept life's scientific wonders with exactly that stark realism. We talk over the telephone; listen to the radio; view the television. And we press a button when we want electric light. Butch Conners was equally practical; it is results that count.)

"I got it all memorized," Conners was saying. "Stand away—give me room an' I'll hook it up. We might's well get goin'."

In their squalid lodging house room, the weird little Thought-machine stood dark and inert, glum and stolid. It was a box-like affair, some two feet cube, mounted on a small wheeled chassis. All its six square faces were plastered with dials, levers and little intricate wire grids. It carried its own batteries, Conners explained. Three wire belts were fastened to it. Conners unhooked them. He put one around his waist; and each of his companions did the same. Then they each selected two wires, and hooked them to their belt. The wires came out of the Thought-machine with a springlike tension.

"We wheel the damned little thing between us," Conners was explaining. "The wires give us about six feet to move around in."

A little knowledge is such a dangerous thing! The Thought-machine stood glum and inert; but presently Conners was fumbling at its starting lever.

"Give it a good shove," Willie urged.

There was a buzz down in the vitals of the weird dark cube, and abruptly it sprang into life—whirring, clicking with a blue-green, violet, red and orange radiance coming to it. The light bathed Conners' room with an eerie glare; bathed the three men who stood with their feet braced. And it permeated the Thought-machine itself so that now, for just a second Conners seemed to see it as a thing alive, monstrously expanding, turning ghost-like . . .

Then Conners was aware of a shock that sent him to the floor in darkness, with Willie and Red on top of him. And then everything went black. Had he fainted?

"Butch, where are you?" It was Willie's frightened voice. He found Willie gripping him in the darkness. Red was here, floating, futilely kicking. Where was the Thought-machine? Conners couldn't see it, but he could seem to feel that he was attached to it and that it was floating here with them.

"My Gawd," Red was faintly murmuring. "I didn't know you felt like this when you were dead."

FOR just a moment it occurred to Butch Conners that he was sorry to have committed suicide like this. They were in a vast abyss of blackness. But there was movement here—gigantic movement of the blackness rushing forward at them, passing to the sides and closing in behind. And then he realized that they were speeding forward. Rushing with the speed of thought. That was it! Dr. Jenks had said it would be something like that. This was the journey; they were on their way!

"What the hell are you scared of?" Conners murmured contemptuously to his two companions. "Everything's okay. Sit tight an' watch—we ought to be gettin' there pretty soon."

One may get used to anything. They seemed presently to be aware that they

were standing together, wheeling the little machine beside them. They could see it vaguely; it looked inert and dark now; but Conners thought that he could vaguely hear it humming. He touched it and found that it was solid. Willie was solid and so was Red. But the abyss was a rushing shadow.

"Wonder what this Realm of Unthought Things will look like?" Conners muttered. "I should think it oughter be pretty big?"

Was there something in Conners' mind then—his thoughts of what he would see—making a reality here in this mental darkness? He murmured his ideas excitedly to Willie and Red and presently they all saw the tiny grey, luminous patch, infinitely far ahead of them in the giant distance. An expanding patch as it rushed forward at them, so that all in a moment it was widening out to the sides, above and below, and closing in behind them.

At first there was just a vast grey-ness, rushing past at railroad speed. And then the grey was taking form; blurred outlines, like mountains of fog in a foggy sky. They were everywhere now, rushing, hurtling in a vast tumbling cataclysm. Then Conners could see valleys between them; and then he realized that the Thought-machine was hurling them into just one valley. Its canyon-like walls were moving more slowly now. Other valleys were visible; and as the speed of everything gradually slackened, there were rifts; pits, and grey cave-mouths.

Avenues into which each of us may probe with his thoughts . . . But Butch Conners knew nothing of that. He was aware only that Red and Willie seemed tugging at him now, as though trying to go a little in some other direction so that he turned upon them angrily:

"Hey, listen, you two—stay with me, dammit."

"I don't see no inventions," Willie muttered. He had his feet planted wide, for a brake against the backward-rushing greyness beneath them. He was staring into the greyness of a shadowy grotto that drifted slowly past. "Say, that's funny," he muttered. "That looks like the back room of Mike's Bar an' Grill. Damn if it doesn't."

Now that should have warned Butch Conners, but it didn't. Red was silently staring into a little window-like cave-mouth. A foolish grin came to his handsome, slack-jawed face; and he sucked in his breath as though with pleasure at something he thought he saw.

But Conners was thinking only of fabulously valuable inventions. The idea would be to pick some small ones. Good goods come in small packages. That crack was true enough. You couldn't tell the value by the size. Pick small ones and you could carry a lot.

"Well, we're here," Conners said suddenly. There was no doubt of it. The movement had ceased. Everything was solid here now—solid grey ground under them; grey rocks, grey walls of this vast grotto in which now Conners could see that they were standing.

THE Realm of Unthought Things!

What an amazing place! Everywhere he looked, vast dim corridors stretched off into the grey distance. And every corridor had others branching from it—a million corridors and yet other millions . . . And every corridor had rooms where shadowy things were piled. Vast rooms with millions upon millions of things in each of them. No, that was wrong. Some of the rooms were empty, where things had been taken out. Everything in the world was here once, and people had gotten some of it out . . .

But certainly there was enough left.

Maybe more than half. And no cops here to guard it. What a cinch! You just stepped up and took what you liked.

Into Conners' vague but eager contemplation of a loot, unguarded here, that could run into billions of dollars, came Willie's voice:

"Don't seem to be nothin' much here, does there?"

Queer how anybody could say that, when everything that ever would be in the world, was right here!

"You're nuts," Conners muttered. "Everything's here. Let's take a look in this room—see what we want an' grab it."

He wheeled the little Thought-machine forward and dragged Willie and Red along with him. Shadowy things were piled in the gigantic room. Conners could see vast shelves on which grey things were stacked. Millions of things, all standing in neat rows—endless rows one over the other, extending in every direction back into an endless shadowy distance. He went up to one shelf. He stared at just one thing on the shelf. Here was something that might be valuable.

Queer. The thing lay right here before him. When he glanced at it casually it seemed to be a little mechanism of some valuable invention. But now, as he gazed at it to see its details, at once it seemed to be formless, elusive, almost as though nothing was there at all.

Butch Conners stood tense, puzzled, baffled. Damn the thing. And then he reached out to touch it. That was queer too. The thing was here, but as though it was only a vague grey mist—or something not even that solid—his hand went through it, feeling nothing. Wasn't the Thought-machine working? What the devil was the matter?

"Hey lookit! My Gawd, there's Whitey O'Neill!" Conners felt Willie

gripping him; and Willie's voice was an excited squeal of fear. "He sees us, Butch! My Gawd, he's pulled his gat on us!"

Red gasped out an oath; and he too was gripping Conners. All three of them tensely stared; and they all saw it. The shadowy recess here was quite obviously the little back room of Mike's Bar and Grill, heavy as always with dangling layers of grey-blue tobacco smoke. The window was open at the bottom. Whitey O'Neill, his tight-lipped mouth grim, his eyes blazing with menace, was there staring at them. And his hand at his hip held his automatic leveled!

"Duck!" Willie hissed in terror. "He's gonna let us have it now, like he always said he would!"

To anyone who conceivably is in the Fourth Dimension, everything else there must of necessity be real. To a shadow, another shadow must of necessity be a thing of substance, perhaps the most substantial thing existing in all the universe. And who shall say it is not also so in our own three-dimensional world—the very existence of which is only conjured by the blended impressions of our five mortal senses? Who can know, apart from our conjuring thoughts, that anything exists at all? To Butch Conners, Willie and Red in that startling moment, there could be no question of the reality of that window of Mike's Bar and Grill; no question of the reality of the murderous Whitey O'Neill, with his three henchmen of the Downtown Mob behind him.

THE Realm of Unthought Things! Whatever it had been a moment ago, it was a bedlam of familiar things now . . . The shabby little street was dim; there was no traffic and only one lone pedestrian furtively lurking at the distant corner of the avenue. One of the

Downtown Mob probably.

"Well, you had it coming to you—say your prayers." Whitey's smooth ironic voice, dripping like ice-water with murderous menace, sounded in the stillness. His voice mingled with the tinny sound of a piano rattling out swing music which came from another window in the front room of Mike's. Red had been staring in there a moment ago, absorbed with a girl who was swaying to the music with hands on her hips and a cigarette dangling from her rouged lips. Conners could see her now out of the tail of his eye.

"Don't move, you'll get it all the quicker," Whitey's voice was ironically saying. "Just say your prayers—"

And Conners didn't have his gun with him; nor did Red; nor Willie! Caught like rats in a trap! But Whitey didn't fire. The sound of a police siren split the night air. An oncoming radio car! And then another! People were at every window now. Staring down. Shouting. The lone man at the Avenue corner was running away, scurrying like a rat. From behind Whitey in the window of Mike's Bar and Grill, one of his damfool mob fired a shot. It went wild; splintered the window glass at the top. Whitey muttered a curse and vanished from the window.

The whole place in there was a turmoil; oaths of men; the screams of women, drinking at the bar and at the tables. Then they were pouring out into the street in a panic . . . The first of the radio cars came howling around the avenue corner, almost on two wheels. Shots began coming from it; a fusillade of gunfire with yellow-red spurts of flame. The leaden slugs splattered the street.

In the midst of the chaos, Conners gripped his two companions convulsively and then shoved at them. "Come on," he muttered. "Get away from here—"

Red was staring up to where a girl with not much on had come running out onto a fire escape, peering down at the turmoil. Then from inside Mike's shots were coming; Connors heard the whistle of one going past his ears. He was trying to run, but something stopped him. Something was tugging at his belt. The Thought-machine! He remembered that they were all connected to it by wires. No time to disconnect them.

"Wheel the damned little thing!" he muttered to Willie. "Have to roll it between us."

Red was still staring up at the girl on the fire escape. He had been muttering about her. Connors gave him a shove. With Willie he tried frantically to heave the little Thought-machine along. They were running away from the avenue around the corner of which the police car had arrived. It had pulled up in front of Mike's. Coppers were pouring out; running into Mike's. A big grey ambulance was coming now; it screamed as it pulled to a halt. White-coated internes leaped out from it.

THEN from ahead of Connors a fire engine came with its siren screaming and its bell clanging.

"Can't—go that way!" Willie panted. "Lookit—"

Ahead of them three radio cars had stopped. The whole little street there near the corner was jammed with policemen. Connors tried to duck into an areaway. He forgot Willie and Red; forgot the Thought-machine. The areaway had a flight of rickety steps down to a basement entrance under a butcher shop. Connors miscalculated the steps and catapulted down head first. There was a flash—a weird puff of soundless

light all around him. He was aware that the little Thought-machine and its wheeled chassis had come tumbling down the steps after him—and that Red and Willie had broken their wires and kept on running up the street—running for a split second until the flash enveloped them.

There might have been a split second also when Connors knew that the Thought-machine had crashed into the areaway. And then his thoughts—his human consciousness, abnormal to this realm, out of tune here, dependent upon the vibrations of the apparatus for their very existence—went black, and there was nothing left of him or his universe as he was hurled away.

Science, or fantasy? Who shall say where one ends and the other begins? Are we not all of us, awake and asleep, questing into the Realm of Unthought Things? What Butch Connors, Willie and Red found there—conjured there if you like—was undoubtedly based upon their quality of thought-vibrations. From the vast storehouse of everything, their inherent thought-energy vibrations could only pick up the vibrations of certain things to which by nature they were attuned, transmuting them into reality—a definite reality, for Connors, Red and Willie.

And if *you* went there—what would you find? Everything is there. What would that little spark of nameless Something which is you, have the power to select? To create into *your* reality? Every instant we live, we are doing just that. Conjuring with the power of our thought—perceiving with our senses—what we think is the reality of this world outside us. How different it must be, to each of us! And, Heaven or Hell, we can make it what we will.



OFF-TRAIL SUPER-SCIENCE NOVELETTE OF INTERPLANETARY ROMANCE!

THE GIRL FROM VENUS

by D. D. SHARP

Author of "Faster Than Light," etc.

Yes, atomic disintegration and argonite would give me the girl from Venus as my bride, and it would give us both health, wealth and complete happiness. . . . What it must also finally do, alas, was make Leatha indistinguishable from any other girl on the planet!



Giant passenger tubes went bellowing into space!

CHAPTER ONE

A STRANGE ESCAPE

"LEATHA!"

I write her name, then stare at my idle fingers in wistful reminiscence. From beyond my window a giant passenger tube goes bel-

lowing into space, eclipsing for a moment that beautiful planet, our evening star.

As the ruddy wake of it fades from the sky, and glowing Venus struggles from under its fiery exhaust, I sit oppressed, pondering how far away that cloud-swaddled world must swing to

be completely swallowed in the shadow of a ship.

Is she, who came so startlingly unto my rocket-ship that strange night more than twenty years ago, there on that far off world, still remembering me? Or is she on earth? I am never entirely sure. And I will never know. Twenty years ago I closed deliberately the only chance there was to make certain, and though I wonder many, many times, I have never regretted the decision.

I was a space pilot then. No man with my love of the void could have chosen differently. The feel of a rocket under me was as natural as my own legs. But I wonder, at times, why I was not strong enough to cut with Kirsh Malakon years before I did.

He was some five years older than I, a heavy-set, black bearded man, with a fatalistic view of life, as we know it here on earth. He shocked me many times with overbold ideas, and he took love and peril with the unconcern he had for the cherished traditions that had come down to us from the experience of other eras.

There were times when, perforce, I admired that trait in him, and times when I despised him for his philosophies as well as his acts.

Kirsh and I had been out to Luna searching for argonite. He had aroused my avarice for the metal with samples he said he had once picked from the pumice strewn crater of Tycho, and he offered to put up half the capital and his knowledge of its location, against the use of my ship and the other half of the expense.

We came back to earth exhausted, broke, and disillusioned. Two days after we had taken our position along the loading trams of the rocket field, a ship named the Wock, which had become known throughout the connected planets because of its attempt at landing on Venus, berthed just across the

trams.

Kirsh was not interested, but I went down to the freight locks of the Zest (my own ship) to watch debarkation. If the Wock had actually touched the surface of the forbidden planet, I hoped to catch close up glimpses of queer biological specimens an atmosphere so suffocatingly heavy with carbon dioxide, could be expected to produce.

In the shadow of my ship, and out of the glare of the port lights, I leaned against a handrail that guarded the loading conveyors. They were now idle, for loading would not start again until dawn.

There was something in the activity aboard the newcomer that soon aroused unusual curiosity. Every man who came out the airlocks seemed charged with excitement. From one I learned the Wock would resupply at once. She was going back almost immediately, and what was more every man aboard was eager to return with her.

This indeed was unusual. Most men home from the void wanted a long rest before taking ship again.

So I watched with growing interest, picking up stray bits of talk from those who passed below me in the shadow of the trams.

Then capping all this a girl came out of the air locks. She carried herself with an air. Never had I seen her like aboard a freighter, not an exploring ship, anyway.

My eyes involuntarily followed her all the way to a trim, blue gyro that appeared to be waiting for her. She had a wild sort of grace in her carriage and a halo in her hair that promised something. Her features, though, were blurred by the floodlights.

A PASSING crew member turned to stare at her. When he discovered that I was watching him, he grimaced at me, then at the girl. There was

distaste in his gesture (not a pantomime to be resented) but rather a warning. It gave me the impression of distrust, even of fear.

"What's all the excitement?" I demanded.

"Ask Cap. Blumendolt," he growled, and melted into the shadows.

I resumed my interest in the ship. Yielding to a magnetic feel that somebody was watching from above, I peered up the bulging hulk of the Wock. There was indeed someone above me, but hardly the type I had expected to see. A lithe, agile form was being lowered down the slick metal hull. Spider-like it tumbled, swinging, balancing, halting, then dropping again. It seemed to be merely a boy. It did not occur to me it was a girl.

That was my first glimpse of Leatha, and I waited idly, never dreaming what romantic adventure she was bringing with her.

At tram level she loosened herself, and the rope was drawn up quickly by an accomplice who had opened the sealed port-hole.

She shook down her skirts, tossed back her hair, then tripped daintily into the open light as graceful every whit as the girl who had come out by the legitimate lock. Indeed, silhouetted against the floodlights, she was very, very much like that other girl, even to the wild grace in her movements.

If they had not been so evidently ladies from civilization I should have suspected they were girls from Venus, courageously journeying to a world neither could have known anything about.

Venus was still unknown to earth, except as an astronomical unit. Now and then in the long history of space explorations, men had probed a few hundred miles into the suffocating CO₂ with which the planet was heavily blanketed. For this reason I had not taken

seriously Blumendolt's vacuo message in which he had claimed to have touched the surface. CO₂ while breathable and much used in oxygen suits for ocean depths, on Venus the proportion of the suffocating gas is far out of proportion for life as evolved on the earth. Plant life yes. It should flourish supertropically, especially under the hot-house blanket of eternal cloud, but not man.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GIRL FROM VENUS

MY mind played with imaginative blooms whose delicate colors were fostered in veiled sunlight and stilled breezes. It toyed also with the thought of a girl there among such flowers, a girl with exquisite complexion that would hardly dare the kiss of an unclouded sun.

So, half suspended between fancy and reality, I observed the girl, growing more and more intrigued with her grace and manifest personality.

She saw me. Perhaps I wasn't shadowed as darkly as I thought. Perhaps she was alien to my earth and her eyes were adjusted to denser shadows than those we knew.

She immediately came across the tram, to flatten against the shadow of a piling, then assuring herself that no one else was watching, hurried forward again.

Below a fluttery blouse of material dainty as silk, she wore a short whipcord skirt, which was smeared by the yellow dust that the Wock had brought all the way from the moonless planet.

Her face was pretty and pleasing, yet even in the dusky light I sensed that character was master of her features. She was, I guessed, rather desperate.

At the platform where I waited, she squared her slender shoulders, took a

deep breath, then as though plunging into cold water, came straight up the skeleton stair.

Hers could have been deep, quiet eyes in other circumstances. Now they were wide with bewilderment and certainly alarm. Yet, despite her evident guilty apprehension, she had a way about her that at once caught and held one's confidence.

She seemed aloof to the smears upon her skirt, nor did she make apology for stowing aboard a ship that was manned by rowdies who had doubtless pillaged all the sacred temples on Earth's sister planet, if there were any such edifices on Venus.

"Please," she began, "I want to see the owner. I have a message for the Zest."

"I am the Captain," I replied, setting down my heels and drawing on a conscious dignity. "Come inside."

She slid past me silent and smooth as a shadow. Her hair brushed my cheek as she passed, laying upon me the intimate allure of contact. Her hands were small and smooth, and very firm in mine as I boosted her over the supply conveyors rather than risk taking her around to the front airlocks under the floodlights of the port.

The bowels of a space ship are somewhat forbidding to the uninitiated, but she seemed quite composed as we threaded aisles between racks of barrels and boxes piled to the proximity of the ceiling.

She ducked under braces and protruding angle irons, and through mazes of steel gray machinery that were lighted dimly by ceiling bulbs with grace that was delightful to follow.

Finally we came to a small steel door that opened out of the smelly oil and merchandise to the first deck.

"Just a little way now," I announced as I switched on lights and pressed the door shut behind her.

There I had my first good look at her. The delicacy of her complexion amazed me. It seemed to confirm my fancy of beautiful Venusian ladies in a landscape of hot house flowers. There was such strangeness in her beauty I stared, wholly insensible to my own rudeness. She held my eyes with the force of persistent gravitation from which those two satellites could not escape. There were little golden flecks in the blue of hers, until her pupils widened to almost swallow the iris.

It struck me suddenly it might be a mistake to take her up to the office. There came an unreasonable dislike of showing her to Kirsh, though I knew well that Kirsh was anything but a woman's man. He would be critical of the smeared skirt, cynical as to her motives, unmoved by her beauty, and unbearably sarcastic when she was gone.

"We needn't go further," I began when she did not speak, "what is the message? It might be well my partner does not find you here. He—well you see this is a man's ship. You're about the first lady ever to board it."

"I must see the owner," she insisted.

"I am also the owner. What do you wish?"

"Then you *are* Mauri Bronson?" She smiled as though she had guessed it all along. "I would have recognized your voice anywhere." She stopped as though at a command, and looked sharply past my shoulder.

BEHIND me I heard the heavy, deliberative steps of my partner. Involuntarily I put my bulk to shield her, and turned about to find Kirsh scowling so superiorly I wanted to smash his big, blistered nose.

But the girl was undisturbed. "You're Kirsh," she asserted, taking a step forward—an expectant inflection in her voice.

Kirsh glared, suspicious as a sphinx.

"Please," she begged, "are you trying to scare me?"

"What are you wanting here?"

"I have an important message for Captain Bronson."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Leatha. I stowed aboard the Wock. I am a native of Venus. I want your help, and will pay for it."

"Venus!" I exclaimed, "But that is impossible!"

"Stowaway," said Kirsh, his heavy underlip awry.

"I shouldn't have told you that," she answered coldly.

"Come on to the office," I invited.

She gave me a look of gratitude. I was surprised that Kirsh followed, and it annoyed me more to discover his eyes running up and down the girl as though she were on the block.

"You want help," he rumbled at her as we entered the office, "What kind of help?"

I shook my head at her, but she either disdained or did not understand my warning, for she opened a metal case that was strapped against one wrist. From it she took an indigo stone.

"I heard your lectures asking for money to search for this. I know where there is much of it."

CHAPTER THREE

SHIPLOADS OF WEALTH

THE moment my eyes caught the blue glint of the metal I knew what the sight of such stuff would do to Kirsh. He and I had endured the rigors of powdery, airless deserts of the moon hoping for a strike not half so pure. The lump in her hand was wholly unoxidized, the highest possible quality, and from first glance there was no mistaking it for anything than the rare and

precious element it turned out to be.

Argonite! The most eagerly demanded mineral in the civilized universe. Argonite in those years was the only element available for an alloy that would insulate the block metal of atomic engines. Argonite protected the contact parts from the contagion of progressive disintegration. For the lack of sufficient argonite to hold atomic disintegration in check, this type of power was but doled throughout the earth, though its cost of production was ridiculously cheap and the fuel widespread.

That lump between Leatha's fingers was sufficient to provide insulation for an engine that would light a city at the cost of a few dollars a year. Yet she offered it as carelessly as had it been a lump of coal. She became startled though, when Kirsh's eyes began to bug out for once in their lethargic existence. She certainly had had no idea of human nature, not as engendered on earth.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded hoarsely and reached after it.

"No. No." She retreated until she was against the office door. "I make a trade."

"Hold on there!" I bellowed as he began to bully her. "Give the girl chance to state her terms." One word more and I would have closed his mouth with my fist. Leatha had certainly taken hold of me. I wanted to defend her, to do any reasonable thing she might ask.

"What kind of a trade?" Kirsh demanded less bullishly.

"He is a plunderer. A thief!" she nodded toward the Wock. "To him a secret has been betrayed by one of my own people. He will come again, and again, and ships will follow when they know what he has found."

She turned on me as though understanding that dealing with Kirsh was like bargaining with cold, thrusting steel. Then she turned to Kirsh again, as though wondering if steel were not,

after all, that which might serve her best.

"How much of this would satisfy you? How much of it do you want to stop the master of the Wock before he leads all earth to overrun my people?"

How little she understood Kirsh, or myself, or any other man of earth. What amount indeed would satisfy any one of us, less than all? And how, did she think, Kirsh could halt Blumendolt and his crew of rowdies from looting her planet? Or indeed, the fever that would start a thousand ships to trail him?

"Little girl, you and me can trade," said Kirsh, with a velvety purr. He dragged his eyes from hers and thrust one hand into a drawer from which he pulled an old fashioned coin purse. From it he shook a pair of keys, then stowed away the argonite and snapped the catch. "It will be safe with me, young woman. And I'll take on the old buzzard."

She put both her palms upon the table to steady herself. She was completely exhausted, that was plain. I pushed forward a chair. She sat down, burying her face in her arms. "You are fine and good," she thanked him with great relief.

She couldn't have had an idea of what she had done to us, to me as well as Kirsh. She had shown to us actual, concrete proof of stuff that would buy anything a man desired. Such a fabulous vein as she described would pay the interplanetary debt, or buy a moon for an island resort. It meant power, prestige, affluence to match all dreams.

THE sleepy, muddy eyes of my partner across the table, were already glowing like live coals aroused by a stirring bellows.

She sat so still I thought her asleep. Her hair was finely spun but thickly curled where it caressed her shoulders like sunlit spray. She was so good to

look at I wondered how Kirsh could remove his gaze to the argonite, which he had taken from the purse and was turning under the light.

He got up, dragged down a pair of troy scales—and she had spoken of loading ships! He weighed the lump, stared a moment at the weight in the balance pan as though to assure himself of its measure, then cautiously he stowed the piece and pocketed the purse. Then without explanation, he left the room.

"Thief!" I thought, "You're planning to rob both her and me of every dime it will bring. Of all men I could have taken on, it had to be a guy like you!"

As Leatha reclined I became worried. The color had bleached from her cheeks. I leaned a little. She did not seem to be breathing. That frightened me. I aroused her and ran for brandy. She drank it and the color slowly returned.

"The last few days I have had no food," she explained.

"You poor kid," I sympathized, and rang for sandwiches.

CHAPTER IV

AN EDEN UNCURED

AS we talked she gradually sketched for me a misty conception of her own world and its customs. If it measured half the picture she gave, I did not wonder that it was so important to her to leave it unmolested by the dissections and aggressions of earthly ideologies.

Here was a planet in which individual aggrandizement was unknown. Here there were no rulers, no priests, no monopolies, no national boundaries and of course no conception of war. "We are too much alike," she explained, "to be subject one to the other."

I tried to imagine what such a place would be like as I sat watching her, gathering her enthusiasm and even a bit of her nostalgia for being exiled from such a perfectly adjusted social and political economy.

There had been an ideology slightly akin to it in a far and isolated section of the North American continent, so archaeologists had concluded from the lore they had pieced together from the legends of those pueblos which had survived until historic times.

There was, however, among those isolated villages, priests and governors and a matriarchal domination of clan possessions. Venus, I gathered, was a much higher tableland of aggregate effort, and the result had been peace unbroken for so long a time, there was on the planet no residue of aggression or despotism. I could understand why the civilization of a planet so conducted and so unhampered, would work rapidly toward its own ideals of perfection.

Somehow as I listened, the old history of the pueblo seemed on the eve of repeating itself. Blumendolt, like Coronado the Conquistador, was in search of Gold Cities.

One of the Venusians, named Trita, had fallen to the blandishments of the earthman who had so much power over his fellows, and she had discovered his weakness. He wanted argonite, so she spoke glowingly of argonite like Estevan the Moor had spoken to the Conquistador, though unlike the tale of Estevan, Trita's story was true.

As the pueblos were in peace and tranquility until men in iron shirts came astride strange beasts to overrun and conquer, so would helmeted men pour from the airlocks of the Wock when Blumendolt returned.

At least that is the way I imagined it as she told of the friendly Venusians opening their hearts and their homes to these men of their sister planet, until

they began to be emboldened to seize and pry.

But there were no hordes of gold, no jeweled idols, no encrusted temples, and Blumendolt was about to leave Venus forever, when Trita had told him of the blue jewel that lay like a strata of sparkling shale beyond the dense forests of the outlands. To afford proof she had taken a handful from the sacred pool where no one had dipped before.

Blumendolt would have travelled at once to the pool and laid open the ledge, but his oxygen tanks were low, so he took Trita along and made off for earth to resupply.

Leatha had stowed aboard, hoping to open a valve and thereby destroy both crew and herself, and thereby also, become the first murderer of her race. But she had failed. Blumendolt's crew had discovered her at the valves, though she escaped them by the help of a Venusian in Blumendolt's pay, who had mistaken her for Trita.

She smiled wryly, and went on, "You see I have a rather unhappy contact with those of your race. Still, I shall not think too evil of them because one was bad. I am sure you nor Kirsh will be like him."

"I'll never let you down," I vowed. I did not like to warn her of Kirsh. I felt it would belittle me in her eyes and I wanted her to think well of me. But I did know she had done about the worst thing she could in showing that metal to him. It was exactly like Trita had tempted Blumendolt. It would be a race between those two men now, of that I felt sure.

I did though give her a hint. She must have guessed more than I put into words for she clutched my sleeve, "Please, he isn't like that other? You are not all?"

"Not all," I assured her, "There is one man of earth who will never let you down, and he is Mauri Bronson."

"But Kirsh? He said he would help?"

"You poor kid," I groaned, "You're in the wrong world. Earth men are dirty mean, and a promise means nothing when they want to be rich. On Terra—be careful."

With that bit of advice I called a big, salmon colored Martian and told him to show her to Thirty Two, which was the nicest cabin I had.

CHAPTER V

A KISS IN THE DARK

IT was long after midnight when Kirsh came back to the office. He focused his muddy eyes upon me. "Where is the girl?"

My impulse was to tell him to go to hell. Instead I nodded down the corridor toward her room. I suppose down deep I didn't want him to suspect how she had hit me, as no other girl had ever so upset me before.

"Tell me," he said suddenly, "Did you ever hear anything peculiar about the women on Venus?"

"I never even knew there were women on Venus."

"Then let me tell you something that might save you trouble. I've been talking to Blumendolt. He was close mouthed about argonite, but spread it rather thick when he talked of the planet. Yet somehow it hit me he wasn't just trying to scare me off."

"You're a bigger fool than I thought," I burst out, "Don't you know he'll guess the girl came here?"

"What of it?" he barked, "I want a showdown. Besides he's ripe for a bargain. Isn't at all crazy about going back, but he wants the stuff. Wants it bad."

He lighted a black panetela from my box, and with it tilted skyward, blew thin, bluish smoke from his nostrils. He

threw a leg over my desk, lowered his heavy eyelids to squint through the view glass as though trying to penetrate the fifty million miles of void that curtained the planet which hid such valuable ore.

"But our bargain with the girl," I reminded.

"Don't be a damned fool," he growled harshly, "she's Venusian." There was an ugly insinuation I didn't like.

"One can never be sure of a Venusian," he added after a moment. "So keep your eyes and your imagination strictly on this!" He emphasized his remark with an oath and flipped the thousand dollar chunk of mineral on the desk.

"I don't get you," I said with enough ice to chill him.

"You simply haven't kept up," he drawled. "Venus would suffocate a red blooded man, and I don't mean CO₂. A planet without money, without initiative. No private wealth, no variety anywhere, and everybody alike. But Blumendolt swears the moist climate and cloud blanket does grow dangerously beautiful girls, like our little Leatha in there."

"Kirsh," my tone should have warned him I was in no mood for banter, "take your own good advice. Keep your eyes and imagination strictly on this!" I picked up the argonite and flipped it back into his lap.

He allowed the piece to lie as it had fallen while he eyed me narrowly. Then he took up the piece, got off the desk, went over to the office safe and locked the argonite within. As he left the office he turned in the door. "Don't be a sap," he growled, and strode down the corridor.

What was he up to, I wondered. Why had he gone to the enemy. Was he about to trade Leatha down the river?

The more I studied, the more disturbed I became. There seemed but one thing to do, waken Leatha and find out all I could which might throw light on

the thinly veiled warnings Kirsh had let loose.

At her door I knocked lightly. Almost immediately it was opened.

"You weren't asleep?"

"You know little of Venus," she said with a twisted little smile as she took my fingers between her two palms. "What will you think of me when you learn I never sleep. We of Venus have no need of the queer half death all earth creatures seem to require."

Her palms were warm and intimate. They drained my speech and awakened me to a sense of incompleteness except when I was near her. The tough fabric which had grown about my heart during bleak hard years among the outer places of the system, thawed and flexed, and warm, young blood moved more violently as I leaned above her. My pulse seemed running away, I leaned nearer and she did not draw away.

Yet even as I leaned, she seemed remotely far off, reminding me of Polaris, steadfast and beautiful, yet fixed infinitely distant from the affairs of men. The difference in our native worlds lay like a chasm to keep us apart, with no possible bridge between our natures and our peoples.

THE soft perfume of her hair was alluring, but oh so alien, like a delicious incense around a pagan priestess, but as I looked down into her brilliant eyes I saw the soul of a woman looking back at me.

It struck me suddenly that all this was ridiculous. That she was no more Venusian than I, though I had to admit the texture of her complexion seemed hardly likely to survive open sunlight or raw wind. "How did you learn English?" I demanded, sure I had caught up with her.

She laughed right into my eyes. It made me feel rather dumb, but the laugh was pleasant, teasing rather than taunt-

ing, delighted rather than superior.

"Radio!" she exclaimed as though drawing a curtain. "We listen in to all your broadcasts. Long ago I learned your tongue. We Venusians have a gift that way, like earth men have for putting together machines."

"That then is why our manners are quite familiar to you?"

"No—o," she hesitated, "I would never say any of us are half smart enough for that, but we do know the words you use. Sometimes a voice catches one's fancy. That is why I came directly to you. I felt I knew you well. You know. The way most everyone feels about a voice that comes into the room day after day. I believe I have followed every one of your Wayside Talks on strange places you have explored."

She was too sincere to tolerate any suspicion of playing up to me, yet I must confess she could have hardly chosen a more direct and effective way to fairly hypnotize me. Here I had a loyal little fan I had not even dreamed could have been interested in those weekly talks I gave to defray part of the expenses of exploration. She swept me off my feet. For the moment I forgot the argonite, the chasm of alien generation that I had felt would lie so impassably between us.

Cloistered there in the dead of night with her alone, while the halo of her hair fell like a golden hood against her cheeks, and her body so supple and slender, and so very near I could have encircled it with my arm, the confession that I was far from a stranger quite completely took me off my feet.

There was an electric moment while she stood with parted mouth and widening eyes, first recognizing what she had done to me, then suddenly her hand sealed my mouth.

Her ears too must have been very sensitive to sound, for I stood several moments completely puzzled by her ac-

tion, before I heard cautious footfall stealing along the corridor outside.

We waited close to each other, her hand softly pressing. The warm scent of the perfume that hid in her hair flowed into me like opium smoke, or rather some unknown narcotic far more fantastic and exciting.

Came a rap on the door. We waited tensely silent.

Then there were words in an unknown tongue muffled by a mouth pressed against the keyhole.

Leatha breathed back a tumult of speech with ka-tuh and che-ak caught queerly under her tongue and the rest of it clicks and hisses.

"Who?" I demanded in a whisper.

The night light from a wall fell dimly upon her flushed face. There was no panic, no quickened breath, the soft blue panels of her bolero lay quietly upon her breasts.

She is brave, I thought.

The steps retreated. She caught both my hands as though for strength or help. "The Wock has orders to leave by daylight. The master is afraid of your friend. They will resupply on Luna, and thereby give him, how you say, the slip? For me, I must go back, quickly."

"Let me handle him," I said with sudden determination. "You wait here. If Kirsh asks, not a word of where I have gone."

"That is not the way," she objected. "He will call the police. Tomorrow the whole earth will know. Never will my people again have peace. Better let him go. We will be aboard, you and I."

"You stay here," I objected. "There will be nothing gained with you aboard. Let me handle this alone."

"I am not afraid with you," she said warmly and handed me a key. "I must be there. That is my mission. Wait anywhere you can hide until he is off, then come to one two third deck. I will be waiting for you."

I took the key, and an involuntary oath slid from my teeth. Her sleeve had slipped down the upraised arm. Down it coursed a fresh, red wound, as from the lash of a whip.

SHE saw my look fixed upon it and quickly shook down her sleeve, shook her head in mock rebuke. "Don't look for imperfections," she teased, "girls from Venus do not wish their ugly marks uncovered."

"Such a wound!" I protested, my heart going out to her and suffocating anger quickening my blood. "Did he?"

"The rope," she hastily corrected, "I slipped."

"You poor kid," I mumbled.

Her hair brushed my cheeks, her eyes lifted and there was wonder in them. As I leaned nearer her eyes grew deep. Her fingers tightened upon mine.

What other invitation would any man need to fold her into his embrace? Her chin raised, letting the cascade of her bright hair fall like moonlit mist around my arms, imprinting my memory with beauty neither time nor circumstance can ever erase. I, who had bludgeoned my way through hordes of black toothed rock eaters of Luna, trembled as I bent my head.

"Leatha," I whispered, breathless at her loveliness, and only then, when she raised her lips, I kissed her.

"Mauri," she said after my lips would allow her words again. "There is something I must tell you now. A warning."

"God you are beautiful," I ignored her words, entranced by the golden flecks that danced in her eyes.

"There is something you must know," she said so practically it irked me that she also had not been swept wild with romance. Now it was my turn to put fingers upon her mouth. "This is what I want to know more than anything else. Do you Venusians believe in love at first sight?"

"I do," she answered very seriously, "when one has heard a voice so long it has become the echo of one's heart. But there is something I must tell you, for your protection, for mine."

She was not to tell me then. There were steps in the corridor again. "Ko-ko is impatient," she kissed me quickly, "I will tell you so soon as you come aboard the Wock. Now I must go."

"Does the argonite mean so much to you then," I asked reproachfully.

"Not the argonite, Mauri, but peace, the peace and safety of my own lovely world. Those men would bring to it the bacillus of personal domination. Your story tellers write of invasions from Venus, Mauri. They over-rate their Earth. No part of Venus is likewise infested with germs and parasites. You see, Mauri, I have more practical reasons than pure idealism, for desiring to keep earth's ships away.

"I believe I begin to understand," I admitted, but wondered what she found in me to overcome such a monstrous handicap. "I'll get my gun, and we will go together."

"No, Ko-ko would be suspicious. It might spoil everything. Meet me aboard after take off."

"Depend on me," I vowed and waited while she slipped through the door and joined the Venusian who waited. As I stood in the dim silence of the room that had shared her, a great foreboding seeped into my courage. I didn't like at all for her to go alone. She had come so unexpectedly out of the night and now had gone back into it again. I wondered if I might not find myself unable to draw the curtain that hid her, that perhaps I might never see her again.



CHAPTER VI

DUPED

SOBER consideration raised many problems that must be met if we were to have a fair chance of checkmating Blumendolt. On my way back to the office I began to reproach myself for so precipitously falling into a scheme so likely to fail. No argument should have persuaded me to risk Leatha again to Blumendolt's power. Yet, even as better judgment overruled my earlier self-confidence, it did not dampen the exciting prospect of being off on romantic adventure with Leatha.

Such a strange night, I thought, as I rang for Kirsh. Why call on Kirsh? I asked myself. Partly, I suppose because it was an old habit having him along when looking for trouble, and partly because I did not feel quite justified in taking chances alone with the crew of the Wock where there would be neither law nor mercy once she cleared from earth.

Still I had not forgotten the way Kirsh had looked at Leatha. Not that I could blame him, nor any man, for being stirred by her. But I had thought Kirsh above the second look at any woman, however attractive. I had looked on him as a man with an asbestos lining in that respect, and I had heard that when a strong man breaks he goes to pieces.

So I stood with thumb on buzzer, debating whether to persist in calling him or refuse to ask him, if he answered. My recollection was vivid as I stood there in the darkness, his muddy brown eyes taking fire. Had he thought to fool me by his reference to the argonite? Wasn't he, after all, as much in love with her as I?

Through the view-glass there was Venus, a little nugget of liquid radiance low against the black horizon of earth—

a great world swaddled in white fleece, tugging at my imagination.

Yet far more disturbing than the mystery of that great world rolling down an endless bowl of space, was the recollection of Leatha's kiss, of her soft warm lips clinging, and the supple curve of her sweet young body without a slightest will to resist the impulse of my arms.

I pressed my hot forehead against the cold quartzite to marvel at her tender beauty, but more at her courage. Far indeed had she come from those she loved, those she understood, and the tranquility she prized so much, to battle new environment where she was well aware abounded pestilence against which her blood was in no way prepared by inoculation nor inheritance.

And because she was indeed so brave, because she had quickened to my kiss, because I had already begun to love her passionately, I newly resolved that Blumendolt should never threaten her nor her world again, nor lay his void burned fingers upon a single other fragment of the treasure that was none of his.

I turned to find Kirsh at the door observing me narrowly. He had on a black felt hat instead of his official cap. He looked quite villainous. The kind of villainy I wondered if a woman might not admire if she was romantically inclined.

"There's dirty work aboard," I said, jerking my thumb toward the Wock. "The girl and I are going to board her tonight. If I do not vaccuo from Luna, pick a crew for the Zest. You should be able to effect our rescue from Venus."

Kirsh's white teeth gleamed wickedly under his moustache. "Keep your attention on argonite," he reminded.

"And yours," I snapped back.

"Let's get this straight," said Kirsh. "If Blumendolt's planning to skip, why not beat his game. Shanghai him aboard some ship for Luna, then dump him

down a volcanic crack. He hasn't taken that crew into his confidence, I'll wager."

"Sounds OK. But don't make the mistake of trying to dump two instead of one."

The line of glistening teeth extended at the lip corners, otherwise he made no acknowledgment of understanding what I meant.

"Better take a flame gun," he cautioned. "Bullets miss. Don't imagine Blumendolt will have scruples."

Without reply I buckled on an automatic pistol. Burning a man was not my method.

WE took a manlift down into the hold, Kirsh going first. At the freight airlocks, almost in the spot where I had stood when I first saw Leatha, Kirsh stopped. Wait until I'm in. If all's clear, I'll signal."

He went down the loading chute and crossed the tramway. It wasn't nerve, going first like that. He and Blumendolt had been trying to trade. Even then I was not sure which Kirsh planned to sell out, Blumendolt or myself.

I was back in the shadow. He mounted the tram, sauntered casually into the freight lock. A guard halted him. He said a few words and the guard let him pass. Kirsh took but a step, wheeled, and felled the guard, ran into the darkness. Soon he was back again, gave me all clear, and again disappeared.

As I hurried across the alley-way I heard a tapping against the deck glass of my own ship. From the third deck it came, quick and insistent. I looked up.

Leatha had not left the ship. She was up there beckoning frantically. I hesitated only a moment. Kirsh would wait to make any attack until I joined him. Leatha certainly had some urgent message for me.

I hurried back to the manlift and

reached the third deck which was now in semi-darkness, but Leatha was standing so that the light from the corridor fell full upon her face.

I hurried along with a queer feeling that something was wrong with her. Something had happened to her eyes, her mouth, her posture.

She smiled encouragingly, yet I halted, puzzled and disconcerted. My bewilderment was slowly changing into distressing unbelief.

She had Leatha's rich hair, her gold flecked eyes, her delicate bloom of cheek, her impudent upturned nose, Leatha's every feature, every line and curve of her form, but she was as repulsive as a snake, and she stood as quivering rigid as a cobra that is about to strike.

She seemed then like a devil, or a vampire, that had stolen the body which had shown so much delightful allure. However much she looked like Leatha she could not be.

CHAPTER VII

LOST IN THE SKY

ALMOST immediately I recalled Leatha's interrupted warning. This was Trita, no doubt, the woman who had caused all Leatha's distress. It was this cold and beautiful serpent who had betrayed the argonite to Blumendolt, who was doubtless in love with him in her brittle way. Ko-ko too had probably mistaken her for Leatha and ignorantly betrayed to the enemy our plans, and she had trapped me.

There was no opportunity, however, to dwell upon past mistakes. From without the Zest came the muffled purr of warming engines. The Wock was losing no time, and Leatha was aboard at the mercy of Blumendolt, and Kirsh. On the in trip she had been compara-

tively free to move about because of her similarity to the girl before me. Since Blumendolt knew Trita was not aboard, she must be doubly imperiled.

Wheeling about I ran for the manlift, and after me, like a streak of pale fire along a fuse, came Trita.

She caught me in the corridor, her soft arms throttling my neck, drawing me back to her, my cheek against her hair.

I tore away, but she was on me again, "Mauri, Mauri, it is I, Leatha. Mauri, are you mad?"

But I knew that she lied, though her flesh was the flesh of Leatha with a fragrance so exotic never to be forgot.

I tore her arms apart, but could not bring myself to fight her as I would a man, though the growling below told me the engines were revving up and there was no moment to spare.

She was quick as a panther and her strength was surprising. Her arms entangled me again and again. "Mauri," she begged, even as she choked me, as she tripped me and blinded my eyes with her hair.

She was a devil, coiling, twining, constricting like a facile and powerful reptile, taking new holds so soon as her arms or legs were pried away.

I heard the Wock gunning up, moving down the rails to the take off. I slapped her face, but she held on, making little sobs between her begging. Then I let go, lay panting in her arms, with a lump swelling up in my throat. I was already too late to recover the Wock. No power of mine could return me to Leatha were I to lay out the girl atop me. For suddenly I remembered the airlocks would be sealed if I could catch the ship, and Blumendolt certainly would not be fool enough to open up and allow me aboard.

Her arms released me. She arose. I got up also, hurriedly.

"You were tough, all right," said the

girl. "I thought you would break in my face."

I glared, and in spite of myself my heart softened. She looked so like Leatha as I would always remember her, except of course for the hardness at the corners of her lips and the cold steel in her eyes.

"You're whipped," she went on. "Now be reasonable."

"You just think I'm whipped," I belated. "I'll vacuo Luna and be there on his tail."

"That's all changed now," she taunted. "He'll not touch Luna."

"Then I'll hound him to Venus!"

"Sure and for what?"

"Leatha!"

"You poor fellow!" she mocked. "How little you know of us. You have blindly expected our planet to be as yours."

"I don't get you," I mumbled, preoccupied with a plan. If this girl loved Blumendolt, they must have arranged a meeting. Whatever planet they had agreed upon I could shadow her. But that was slow. Too slow. No telling what might happen to Leatha while I delayed.

"Venus has the blue mineral argonite, but it lacks one that has played a most important part in the history of your earth. Our land is very deficient in potassium salts."

"I still don't get you," I repeated.

"Sure," she agreed. "You are only a pilot. Had you been a chemist, or a biologist, at once you would have guessed. In my world there are no mutations—none whatever. Generations of Venus have not felt the effect of potassium salts."

"Don't you understand?" she went on as I stared stupidly. "There is no variation in species, nor types, *every woman on Venus is exactly alike!*"

Still I stared, jaws hanging.

"You will find a thousand Leathas,

and never be sure of any one of them."

"I would know her," I vowed. "Whatever may be true about the effect of potassium radiations, there is a difference in individuality. She's no more like you than Catherine the Terrible!"

"No?" she sneered. "Maybe you think of Venus as a little ball in the sky that a man might sweep his hand over. Suppose she was lost here on your earth? Would it be easy to find her? And there are lean and fat, tall and short, dark and fair. On Venus?" she raised her eyebrows hopelessly.

"Then what of him?" I taunted becoming cunning. "Do you think he will come back?"

She gave me a queer look, then tumbled to what I was trying to do. "You really don't know us," she exclaimed. "A Venusian, you fool, never feels about the one she loves like that."

CHAPTER VIII

RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

I NEVER saw Trita again though there was no device I did not try to discover where she had gone. None of the passenger lanes had taken her to Luna, nor had any of the freighters booked her. My ultimate conclusion was that she had taken a leaf from Leatha and stowed on some outbound rocket. It was only after long months of tracking and searching that I discovered she had taken a Salo Rocket for Mars, almost the opposite course to Venus at that position of the planets. And by then I had no need of looking to her further. Blumendolt never kept his promise to meet her.

All the while I had private agencies tracing the girl I fitted the Zest for the perilous attempt at landing on Venus. as later developed. Trita at that time was surely on earth,

A picked crew for my purpose was a mean job, and besides the regular provisions and oxygen supplies, I prepared extra oxygen, tools, and explosives to blast the argonite. After all, if we landed successfully, Leatha should have a shipload of wealth for her sufferings.

That was the most trying, the most distressing, and the most determined month of my life. Finally all was set and with airlocks sealed I warmed up and drifted the ship out to the runway.

As I opened the guns the whole ship buckled as though heaving apart. Immediately I cut power, dropped down the manlift and ran out into the night, followed by members of the crew.

When I reached the stern of the ship I began to understand how loyal to a man a Venusian could be. The spotlight fell into a gaping hole. Part of the hull was peeled open. Flues were blown to bits. Anywhere I moved I stumbled over fragments of the powerful and costly combustion engines and chambers.

Bitter with furious hatred and frustration, I cursed Blumendolt, but could not help admire the courage of the minx who had risked all to carry out her pledge to the man she loved, though only God could know what she found in him.

The more I surveyed the wreckage, the more distressed I became. It would take a year, perhaps more to repair the damage even had I the enormous credit it would require to finish the job. I groaned as I thought of the argonite ledge. There was enough on Venus to buy me a ship, but Blumendolt, not I, would be the first to reach it.

Involuntarily I stared across the breast of the earth to where Venus shone steadily and with such impassive splendor. And amid the ruin I raised my hand and swore, "Leatha, I will not fail you a third time. If you live some day again I will hold you in my arms."

So, biting down my despair, I turned on my heel and went up to the office to start engineers to drafting plans.

That was a desperate year. I exploited every means within the boundary of common sense, and I still lacked a great deal of money. It was then I hit upon the scheme of lecturing on the possibilities of biological consistencies on a potassium minus Venus. After each lecture I would raise enough money in the interest of science for the expedition.

Little by little I discovered that my romance with Leatha was creeping into my talks about the planet, its ideology and its perfections. After all it was Leatha, and not science, which drove me on and on, day and night.

Not once did I pass the freight lock, nor the shadowy smells of the hold, but Leatha haunted them again, like a dear mystic flame that my eyes could not quite make out, but which I could perceive intensely in my heart.

Always she seemed to be puzzled, as though unable to understand why I had failed her. Always she seemed defending me to herself, repeating over and over that I was not like Blumendolt. That I had not betrayed her.

Yet I knew how it must seem that I had. Kirsh aboard, and he had been bargaining to sell her out. And I hanging behind. At that point I would put the thoughts of all that concerned her away.

So she was always on my mind, and gradually her story came out in my radio talks. Maybe she would be listening I thought as I told my tale. Perhaps she would come swinging down the gull of some space tramp to slip across the trams into the freight locks again. The public liked the spiel and the subscriptions grew, and I began to watch beside the freights every night, hoping by some wild chance she might come hurrying across the trams.

THEN one night a vacuuo came which exploded my whole scheme even more disasterously than the bomb Trita had placed in the hold.

Kirsh was back on Luna. This was the message. "Stranded. Vacuuo passage money and any excuse you think up for ditching me so completely that night. The girl tried to still believe in you. Really I felt sorry for the kid. It occurred to me to make you out a damned coward. She had seen the last of you. It helped to give me the breaks.

"If this sounds soft you're in for a shock. We were married on Venus. She changed completely soon after we landed.

"There wasn't any argonite, at least we failed to find it. Blumendolt insisted, and wanted to go to Mars for a dame he called Trita. He believed she would know where the stuff was. The crew mutinied. They put him off in a life rocket, me too, but Leatha was too smart for them. So here we are. Passage money and the old job and I don't remember a thing. KIRSH."

"So," I muttered half aloud, "he was too much for her. Funny how women go for his type."

The shock of it came slowly, it seemed so unreal that Leatha should have forgotten so soon. I would go on with the expedition, of course, but without any heart in it.

Kirsh, the bearded pirate of the void, coming home with a wife. It was rather ridiculous. And his note as tame as that of an office clerk coming back to his desk.

Then like a stab that begins to hurt minutes after the numb, deadening shock, I remembered Leatha across the desk there, in that leather upholstered chair, eager with her cause; then in room 32, the golden flecks in her earnest eyes, and finally with a twitch of pain, the touch of her lips, eager, lingering, responsive.

Well I had had my dream, and I was glad that she had survived the peril of being aboard with Blumendolt. As I sat it was difficult to judge which would have hurt less, that she had gone to her death still questioning my failure to keep faith, or coming back as the wife of the man I was beginning to hate, more and more bitterly.

I reached for a vacuuo pad. It was out of the question to give Kirsh his old position. The first month one of us would be killing the other. Perhaps, I wondered, he might like to conclude the expedition. After all Leatha would be invaluable on Venus. If I offered the ship.

But in that despondent state of mind I decided a man should make no decisions. I pushed away the pad and rested my chin in a palm as I stared through the view window at shadowy tramways far below. My thoughts, like those of an old man who lives only in his recollections, were of Leatha.

Behind me came footsteps and a boy in uniform handed me another message. It too was from Luna.

"Mauri. I heard your story on the ship's radio, and again on Venus. I wanted to walk into the freight locks out of nowhere, to surprise you, but I have learned Kirsh has just sent you a message. I should have told you about Trita and how much all girls are alike on Venus. I only excuse myself because it was so necessary to take no delay that night. Kirsh is married to a Venusian girl he calls Leatha. While he was in my country it was funny to watch him, there were so many all around with eyes and hair and noses all alike. I don't know how he can be sure of even his own wife.

"The argonite is safe. Blumendolt was taken from the life rocket but he did not live. So there is nothing that I come to ask of you, except that maybe you tell me again, *Ki ti lami*, which in

my tongue means "I love you."

"No answer," I said to the boy and tossed him a coin.

Then I sat puzzled indeed, swung between hope and disbelief.

Which was Leatha, Kirsh's wife or the other? Soon, of course, I would know. I had no doubt the moment I saw her, or at most, when I took her in my arms again, I should lose all doubt. But until then a thousand little ideas thrust stinging questions at my mind.

She had heard my radio speeches. From them she could have gathered the salient items of my contact with Leatha. Was she Leatha really, or some adventuress of the Trita type after romantic adventure? Or perhaps my story had prompted action on the part of some young thing who was sorry for me?

Looking back on those times, I am not sure, even today, which was Leatha. Whether the woman who all these years has remained loyal, helpful and beloved, is the same dear girl who put up her lips to receive my kiss that eventful night in cabin 32 of my old rocket ship.

BOTH proved to be identical in appearance, as of course I expected. But I failed ever to separate their daintiness, gentle natures so as to ever say to myself surely, this one is Leatha, or that one can not be.

There was a way, a simple test, but I never had the courage to try it, since one was already married to Kirsh and the other to me. If I discovered Kirsh had married the true Leatha, always my unkept pledge would haunt me, or I might even have found there was yet another who had perished aboard the Wock, who never understood why I had failed her.

For that reason I asked her never to let me look upon the arm the rope had burned until the scar of it was healed.

She never did. Sometimes I believe she would have insisted upon proof, if she had been Leatha indeed. But she is Venusian, and they have queer ideas of loyalty. She might have thought it unfaithful for her not to wish to acquiesce in that which I demanded so fervently.



STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of Marvel Stories, Published Bi-Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1940.

State of New York, } ss.
County of New York }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Abraham Goodman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Marvel Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., N. Y. City, N. Y.
Editor, Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., N. Y. City, N. Y.
Managing Editor, Martin Goodman, 330 W. 42nd St., N. Y. City, N. Y.
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2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)
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3. That the known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.)

ABRAHAM GOODMAN, Business Manager.
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1940. MAURICE COYNE.

[SEAL]

(My commission expires March 30, 1942.)

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SCIENCE-FICTION'S MOST SENSATIONAL AUTHOR
GIVES YOU HIS MOST STARTLING STORY!

LUNDOON never forgot the night the Child was conceived—oddly, from a word of his own. The three men had worked all day, vainly, trying to perfect Kallent's antigen for the "war fever." It was a quiet mid-night, and they sat around a simple lunch in the bare little office of

He has caught the war-plane! He crushes it in his



MIND-STAGGERING FEATURE-LENGTH FUTURE-SCIENCE NOVELETTE OF THE MAD

by JACK WILLIAMSON

Author of "After World's End," etc.

Kallent's bio-chemical laboratory on the Jersey meadows. Listening with the modesty of twenty-one, Lundoon poured coffee into tin cups from a ther-

With the dry, precise austerity of a convenanter, Andrew Douglas supported that text with quotations from the evening paper. The eurasian war

fist, ignoring the two-ton bombs exploding around his head.



Some day science will create a super-man, they told Lundoon—not just a thinking machine, or a robot, but a being wise and powerful. Lundoon wondered if the day had not come . . .

mos jug, quietly offered it to nervous little Douglas and gaunt, grave-eyed Kallent himself.

"Aye, the world's ill!"

was spreading. A million were on strike, here in America, and millions unemployed. Everywhere there was oppression, corruption, human misery. And

WARS OF TOMORROW AND THE TEST-TUBE DICTATOR MEN WILL CALL KING!

now the "war fever" was ravaging half the world.

Sometimes this new, man-made pandemic was called the "whistling death." Because the virus attacked the respiratory system, and the last hopeless battle for breath made a characteristic sound. The virus was a product of protein-synthesis in "biological warfare" laboratories, and both armies had scattered it, in simultaneous thrusts at civilian morale.

"'Tis more of Cotterstone's work," rasped the dried-up little Scot. "They've learned in Washington that agents of World Chemical and Steel sold the virus to both sides at once—warning each country that they must hasten to use it for self-defense, because the enemy was planning to. An old trick of Cotterstone's. Now, if our antigen fails, the plague may sweep all the world!"

The gaunt stooped bio-chemist shook his huge grizzled head, solemnly. Jethro Kallent looked twenty years older than his forty-four—all except his eyes. His eyes were blue and young with the undying fire of genius.

"We can't fail," Kallent said.

Wendell Lundoon—lean and earnest, for two years Kallent's eager assistant—felt his hands clench. He had caught the fire of Kallent's genius, and his smooth youthful face reflected Kallent's firm purpose.

"No," he whispered. "We won't fail."

"But the world's ill." Douglas nervously stirred his coffee, on the corner of the big acid-stained desk. "Lost. Aye, and damned! The old faith has weakened. But men need a god. A being of power, that they must look up to and obey; one to choose the way, and lead them, and punish those who straggle. That's why they must set up dictators, and worship them like demi-gods."

SLOWLY, Kallent set down his empty cup.

"Science is religion enough for me," he said quietly. "Science—in the service of human progress—has room for all the awe and humility and sacrifice and devotion and sheer exultation that any human being is capable of."

"For you, perhaps," admitted Douglas. "But most people can never grasp that ideal. They need to fear, and worship, and follow. They are too small to stand alone. They need to lean on something greater than themselves."

Lundoon's serious young face was illuminated with a thought. His dark head lifted, with a sudden eager motion.

"Some day," he whispered, "science will create such a god. I mean, a superman. Not just a thinking machine, or a robot. But a being wise and powerful—"

The youthful researcher checked himself. His first awe of Kallent's huge learning had increased, in their two years together. And the vastness of this idea was almost appalling. Flushed, feeling a little foolish, he looked diffidently at the tall gaunt-bio-chemist. But Kallent was nodding soberly.

"Perhaps," he said softly, "it could be done!"

Lundoon stared at him, whispering:

"Do you think—"

But Kallent said no more. His deep-sunken eyes looked past Lundoon, as if they saw something far-away and great. His furrowed face smiled faintly. Then a look of weariness and pain settled upon it. And Lundoon remembered a bitter, seldom-mentioned chapter in Kallent's life.

Kallent had worked for years, Lundoon knew, on the problem of synthetic life. Through the vague contemporary concepts of static equilibrium, dipolar moment, alpha brain-waves, electrochemical transmission, he had ad-

vanced to a more fundamental grasp of the laws of life. He actually announced the creation of living cells—and was stunned by the popular reaction to that triumph. The sensational press roused a savage resentment against him. Laws were demanded, “to keep creation for the Creator.” Then the war came. Kallent dropped his biosynthesis experiments, for his efforts to protect the world from the deadly products of the biological warfare laboratories abroad.

“Aye,” cried little Douglas, “if science could make a god!”

But Kallent said no more.

It was a month later that Kallent announced his “anti-virus”—a synthetic protein which conferred lasting immunity to the virus of the “whistling death”—in time to arrest the first cases breaking out in American ports. The great pandemic was checked, and uneasy peace came to the exhausted Eurasian nations.

In the midst of the praise and awards heaped upon him, Kallent quietly announced that he was leaving the laboratory. Even to Douglas and Lundoon, he refused to reveal fully his purpose.

“I have another piece of work to do,” he told them. “You had to point it out to me, Wendell. But I see now that all I have done is mere preparation for it. It’s a big thing. It may take the rest of my life. If it succeeds, there’ll be nothing more for me to do. If it fails, nothing else will matter.”

HIS eyes were looking far away again.

“The thing can’t be done in America. Jethro Kallent wouldn’t be allowed to attempt it, anywhere. So I am going to leave America. And Jethro Kallent is dead. Jethro Jones is going to make a new experiment in bio-chemistry—somewhere.”

Douglas whispered, “Alone?”

Kallent’s rugged, grizzled head nodded.

“I must go alone. There are essential tasks for both of you, behind. Jethro Jones is going to need money and information and equipment. Andy, a Scot can always make money.”

“Aye,” said little Douglas.

Kallent set his lean hand on Lundoon’s shoulder.

“Wendell,” he said, “Jethro Jones will probably have a few research problems for you. And you must take my place, in the laboratory here. We must be ready, when Cotterstone decides to sell mankind another war. I think you need more training, and I’ve outlined a course of study for you—you’ll work with some of the biological warfare experts, abroad.”

Kallent shook their hands, picked up a black brief-case that was already initialed “J. J.,” and walked swiftly out of the laboratory—and apparently out of the world of men.

Where had he gone? Lundoon had not dared ask—he knew that Kallent had already told them as much as he thought wise. Douglas, he knew, had instructions for forwarding letters and money and scientific equipment to Jethro Jones, but the little Scot refused to divulge the address.

“Kallent is afraid,” he told Lundoon. “Aye, afraid of Cotterstone. We didn’t tell you, but we had a wire from Cotterstone, after the anti-virus was announced. He offered Kallent a round million a year to work for World Chemical and Steel. Kallent replied with a devastating no. But Cotterstone is not a man you can say no to, safely.”

Douglas knew no more than Lundoon of the mysterious “bio-chemical” experiment that “Jethro Jones” was going to attempt.

“Andy, do you suppose—?”

Lundoon couldn’t forget that midnight conversation. The thing was in-

credible, too stupendous to be possible. Yet everything seemed to hint at it.

"Do you suppose, Andy, that he's going to try to make a superman—a god?"

With a characteristic bird-like quickness, Douglas shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "But, if any man could do such a thing, it is Jethro."

No word came back from "Jethro Jones."

CHAPTER II

KALLEN had refused to demand any large reward for the "war fever" antigen. After he was gone, Lundoon spent seventy hours in the laboratory, and emerged with a formula for a new household antiseptic. Thereupon Andrew Douglas displayed his canny Scotch genius at finance. He organized the Jethro Kallent Electro-Biological research Foundation, with an initial endowment, from advance royalties on the antiseptic, of half a million dollars.

Lundoon prepared the first shipments of biological — and, oddly, metallurgical — equipment ordered by "Jethro Jones." Douglas forwarded the crates, together with drafts for a hundred thousand dollars.

Presently, then, Lundoon was off to begin the two years of study that Kallent had outlined. He was in Paris, at work under a distinguished French astro-physicist, when he met Gina Arneth.

Deciding that his pupil was working too hard, the Frenchman began to vary his discourse on sub-atomic chemistry with lectures on the Gallic art of living; and finally presented Gina as a competent instructress in the latter.

Lundoon was instantly captivated with the beauty of her tall, pale body,

the flame of her hair, the flashing spirit of her violet eyes. To the savant's astonishment, he persuaded her to break her contract to sing in a night club, to fly with him to the *Avalon*.

The isle-port, for two weeks, was to Lundoon a dream of happiness. A scientific vision of his boyhood, made real. A floating man-made atoll, it ringed an oval blue lagoon, bore the gardens, hotels, and casinos of a luxurious resort.

Gina seemed his dream of perfection. He found her spirited, clever, winsome, gay, utterly lovely. The holiday was expensive, but Douglas, back at the Foundation, honored his drafts without comment.

The day came, however, when the scientist woke in Lundoon. Climbing with Gina back to the swimming deck, after a plunge in the cobalt tropical lagoon, he told her abruptly:

"Let's get dressed. I want to talk."

When they were seated at a palm-shaded table on the uttermost deck, the cool sea-wind in their faces, Gina squeezed his hand and whispered:

"Happy, Wendy?"

"I've been happy," he told her soberly. "But I have work to do. Last night I had an idea. I see—I think I see—a connection between one of Dupre's astro-physical tensors, and the ultra-microscopic radiogens that now appear to be the key to life. Astronomy illuminating biology! Or maybe I'm crazy. Three months in the lab, and I'll know."

The hair of Gina Arneth, in the strong tropic light, was like spun flame. Her pointed oval face was smiling, and her violet eyes flashed with a taunting challenge.

"Wendy, what about me?"

Reaching across the little table, Lundoon took both her hands.

"Gina," he whispered, "will you marry me?"

"I love you, Wendy." Her voice

trembled — yet something reminded Lundoon that she was a trained actress. "But you know already that I am—costly. I must have money, and the splendor that money buys. Money is food to me. Without it, I would die."

Her violet eyes were misty.

"You have ability, Wendy. You could make money."

LUNDOON'S dark head lifted, and a slow grin smile twisted his face.

"If this idea turns out as I expect," he said softly, "my friend Cotterstone would give several millions for just one simple application of it—to drown the world in blood again."

Against the green translucent fronds and the sea's far glinting blue, a brightness suffused the face of Gina Arneth, until he thought that it was like a fantastic painting of some malicious elf.

"Wendy!" It was a hushed, eager plea. "Millions, Wendy—"

His face turned bitter.

"I love you, Gina." His laugh was a short harsh sound. "Funny — because it seems you stand for everything I hate." He stood up, and the chair fell unheeded behind him. "But—won't—" He choked, gulped. "Won't you go with me, Gina?"

"Not today!" Emotion caught her voice. "Take time to think, Wendy." She was in his arms—he drew her against him, in spite of himself, and her hair was soft and fragrant in his face. "Money is so much—"

He pushed her roughly from him.

"See that purple flying boat down on the lagoon?" Torture drove him to cruelty. "That's Cotterstone, the munitions king. If you want blood-money, Gina, you had better go to him!"

At the savagery of that, she went pale as if he had struck her face. She pushed over the little table, so violently that its service was flung through the rail into the sea, and ran away from

him. She was sobbing.

Mechanically, Lundoon set up the table and his chair, and then went down to make his reservation on the next Clipper for New York. He went back to work, in Kallent's old laboratory. In three months he knew that the new idea—sprung from the seed the French astrophysicist had dropped into the fertile bed of Kallent's modified radio-genic theory — was something greater even than he had hoped.

He knew that Cotterstone would, indeed, give millions for the development of it that he called the azoic radiation. But every precaution had been used for secrecy. Douglas alone knew the details of his success. Lundoon was surprised beyond measure when the armament king came himself to the laboratory.

J. Hollworthy Cotterstone was a big man, single, violent-tempered, fifty-six. His masses of flesh looked puffed and unhealthy. His face was pale and splotched, and his small leaden eyes were set too close together.

Cotterstone's origin was unknown, the name but the last of a series of aliases that confused the details of his colorful early career as munitions salesman and war-promoter. A child, he had been a bootblack—and, the rumors went, purse-snatcher — in the towns along the Danube. Now only he knew the number of his millions, or the measure of his veiled power.

"I'll be frank with you, Lundoon."

It was in the office of the new administration building, that Douglas had built while Lundoon was abroad. Cotterstone strode ponderously up to the stained old desk that had been Jethro Kallent's, and his voice was loud and flat. "I understand that you've invented a death ray. I want to buy it."

"I don't know how you understand it." Lundoon's lips had tightened. "We made no such announcement."

"It doesn't matter how I know," Cotterstone's pale unblinking eyes were keen and yet somehow stupid-seeming. "What's your price?"

LUNDOON'S eyes flickered shut, and he leaned across the old battered desk.

"I tried to make it clear in my wires, Cotterstone," he said. "The azoic ray is not for sale."

The splotches on Cotterstone's puffy face turned purple.

"You're a damned fool, Lundoon." He shook a soft pinkish fist. "War is a business, all right—but a dangerous business. It's easy to get your fingers burned. World Chemical and Steel will pay as much for your weapon as any other interest will. But I warn you—if you refuse to sell—"

The big man was heaving, too breathless to go on. Lundoon rose slowly behind the desk.

"Listen, Cotterstone." His voice rang cold. "If war comes again, I'll give the ray for the defense of America and democracy—without a cent of cost. But—speaking your language—I'm not interested in murder for profit—not at any price."

He drove a hard finger into Cotterstone's quivering middle.

"Now get out!"

Gasping and sputtering, dangerously mottled, Cotterstone at last got out. At the door, however, he found breath and voice enough to indicate that he was used to crushing whatever stood in his way, and that he would enjoy annihilating Lundoon.

Standing tense behind the desk, Lundoon saw more than the varnished panels of the closing door. He saw a pointed, elfin face, with lucent violet eyes shining from its pallor. Strange, after nearly two years, how hard it still was to forget.

He sent for Andrew Douglas. Some

dark shadow, of late, hid the old twinkle behind the nervous little Scot's gold-framed glasses.

"Andy," Lundoon said softly, "please collect all our records that you have dealing with the azoic ray—every scrap of paper—and bring them here to me."

The mild slight man stiffened, his shadowed eyes flashed.

"Why?" Puzzled, Lundoon merely waited, until Douglas rapped tensely, "What are you going to do with them?"

Regret turned Lundoon's eyes black as he whispered:

"I'm going to destroy them—and all my own notes."

The pale lined face of Douglas smiled and relaxed.

"I'll get them at once, Wendy. Forgive me, but I knew that you had just seen Cotterstone—and I know Cotterstone."

Lundoon smiled a hard white smile.

"Then you understand. If Uncle Sam ever needs the ray, we can set down the specifications from memory."

"Aye." The voice of Douglas shook. "Though that would be a bitter day. I hope the ray can be forgotten."

Lundoon looked at him, suddenly.

"Have they come to you, Andy?"

Douglas ran nervous fingers through his fine graying hair.

"I know almost as much about it as you do, Wendy—unfortunately." His face went sternly white. "Cotterstone's agents came to me when you refused their first offer. They have brought to bear a pressure—difficult to resist."

Lundoon stared, astonished.

"Why didn't you tell me, Andy?"

DOUGLAS hesitated, bit his quivering lip.

"I couldn't, Wendy." His gray face was pinched with pain. "Once—long ago, Wendy—I did a foolish thing. I thought I had escaped it. But Cotter-

stone's spies know everything." His voice was low and hoarse. "A hard choice they offered me—disgrace, or millions. I'm glad you made this decision."

Douglas brought a thick envelope. Lundoon took a brown folder from the safe. Douglas watched nervously as he burned the sheets one by one, holding each until the flame was close to his fingers, and carefully crushing the ash.

The violet eyes of Gina Arneth looked reproachfully from the flames.

"Now," Lundoon sighed, "the plans exist only in our brains."

Looking tense and pale, Douglas echoed faintly:

"In our brains."

But Lundoon, in his own relief, failed to grasp the significance of those words—until, the next morning, he found the body of Andrew Douglas lying on the laboratory floor. One more record of the azoic ray had been blotted out—by the azoic ray itself, for the head had been charred and hardened in a way that only Lundoon could understand.

CHAPTER III

THE telegram came two days later, when Lundoon was standing beside the new grave, on the grassy hill above the laboratory. The flat marble slab, he decided, would bear only the name of Douglas. Anything more, he felt, would be too little to say.

"Dear Wendy," the message ran. "I have not forgotten, and I know that you have not. Still, after two years, I believe that a meeting can mend our shattered happiness. Flying, I shall arrive close after this. Believe me, yours, Gina, Countess of Arneth."

The eyes of Lundoon darkened as he read it, and the lids veiled them briefly. He looked down at the raw mound of

red earth. A sudden anger made him tear the yellow sheet in two. But the woman's flame-haired beauty still smiled from the fragments. He smoothed them and put them in his pocket.

An unease settled upon Lundoon, sharper than his grief for Douglas. A fascination seized him, eager and yet apprehensive. Had two years changed her? Did the title mean she had won the wealth and position she yearned for?

Lundoon walked on aimlessly, and the steel-fenced grounds were transformed into the floating gardens of the *Avalon*. The wind was suddenly scented with the sea. He was hardly surprised when Gina Arneth came to meet him, along a gravel path.

"Wendy!" Her voice was rich with the same moving magic. "They told me you were wandering up here—somebody's dead?"

He nodded, and bitterness choked him.

"Andrew Douglas—my best friend. He died to save himself from doing what you asked me to do, on the *Avalon*." Her violent eyes were startled, curious. "Cotterstone somehow learned about the azoic radiation. And Douglas died to keep it from him."

He tried to smile, and led her to a sun-warmed stone that made a seat on the grassy slope.

"Tell me, Gina, about yourself?"

She shook her flame-colored head.

"Nothing has happened, Wendy, nothing—important." Her violet eyes searched him, and her throaty voice was eager. "I still want you, Wendy, as much as I did on the *Avalon*."

"Your other tastes?" he asked softly. "Have they changed?"

"I'm still costly—but that won't matter now." Her silken voice paused. "You see, I know how much Mr. Cotterstone is offering for your invention.

I came to beg you to accept his offer—and me.”

Lundoon rose suddenly. He seized her shoulders and dragged her upright. She winced from the abrupt blazing blackness of his eyes. His grasp tightened, until she cried out with pain. He released her, then, stepped back.

“I had wondered how Cotterstone found out.” His voice was quiet and tired, bitter. “It was you, Gina.” She cowered before the black accusation on his face. “I told you to go to Cotterstone, if you wanted blood-money. And you did.” His voice went hard, relentless. “And he made you a countess. And he sent you here!”

The flame of her head tossed defiantly.

“What if I did? Luxury is my life, and Cotterstone could give it to me.” The brittle voice snapped, and she was pleading again. “I love you, Wendy. Really—”

His black face stopped her.

“Gina, do you know what you’ve done?” His voice was hushed, stricken. “You’ve murdered my best friend!”

SUDDENLY he was fighting to stop hysterical laughter.

“I’m sorry, Wendy.” Her soft eager arms slipped around him. “The *Dawn Girl* is waiting at the airport—my new flying yacht. Let’s fly away, Wendy—to where you can forget. Back to the *Avalon*. To Celebes—anywhere. I do love you, Wendy!”

He stood stiff and silent in her arms.

“You must sell, Wendy.” Her body was slim and soft against him. “Don’t you see?” Dread edged her voice. “Cotterstone hates you. He—he’ll kill you, Wendy!”

Lundoon laughed again. His face twisted into a pale mask, without merriment. The girl turned white, shuddered.

“Stop it, Wendy! You’re dreadful.”

Her hands tried to smooth the laughing mask into a face again. “Listen, Wendy.” She spoke with a new voice, lower, steady, resolute. “Come away with me—anyhow. Cotterstone will get us in the end. But for a while we could be happy.”

He stared at her, with a slow strange smile.

“There’s Eve in you, Gina,” he whispered. “Eve and Lilith too. You could make—make a Judas of me. Someday, maybe, you will. But I’ve still got a job—now, it’s Andy’s job. Dr. Kallent will be depending on me.”

His mouth drew to a thin, grim line.

“Go back to Cotterstone, Gina. Tell him: no sale.”

Her white loveliness froze in a stare of pained amazement.

“You’re cruel—cruel!”

He saw the glitter in her violet eyes, and made a little motion toward her. But she had already turned. He held himself, as she ran away toward the gate. Then he walked slowly back toward the administration building.

He was wondering if Douglas had left any forwarding address for “Jethro Jones.”

CHAPTER IV

ANDREW DOUGLAS had left the books of the Foundation in careful good order. Large cash withdrawals, made on the day before his death, were credited to “J. J.—Field Experiments.” But a search of all his files failed to disclose how the funds had been forwarded, or how to communicate with “Jethro Jones.”

Lundoon could only wait. He occupied himself with the Foundation’s financial affairs, and with tests of an anti-virus that promised immunity to influenza and the common cold. Three

months passed without any word from Kallent. Then the radiogram arrived, sent from Panama and addressed to Douglas:

"Project has resulted in unforeseen catastrophe. Am returning by air. Follow newspaper stories of terror in Andes. Ask Lundoon to stand by for emergency. Explain on arrival. Jethro Jones."

Lundoon read the message twice, and sent for all the morning papers. He searched them for South American items. He found two, neither apparently important. Seismographs had recorded a minor earthquake, centering somewhere among the little-known summits of the Cordillera Oriental. The other item dealt with the famous statue, the "Christ of the Andes."

The Quechua natives of the high *páramos* of Ecuador and Peru, item stated, were reported to be in superstitious panic because of a rumor that the statue had left its pedestal, above the tunnel of the Trans-Andine railway, to stride northward through the Andes on a tour of mad destruction.

"Railway officials," the item concluded, "state that the statue is still in place."

That was all.

The evening papers, however, had no lack of South American news. The first extra shrieked in immense black type:

2,000-FOOT MAN

RAVAGES ANDES

Breathless, Lundoon devoured the bold-faced box in the middle of the page:

For twenty-four hours the most amazing news story conceivable has been coming by radio and cable from various points in South America. A 2,000-foot giant, the story goes, is striding in a frenzy of destroying madness through the bleak uplands of Ecuador and Peru, spreading terror and death

among the native Indians.

Suspecting hoax, news agencies have held up the story for verification. Conclusive evidence is so far lacking, and the editors of this paper feel that the reports are incredible. However, as the dispatches continue to arrive, from points as widely separated as Quito, Guayaquil, and Lima, laden with increasing detail, it is felt that public duty demands their publication in full.

While this paper is able naturally to assume no responsibility for the facts, frequent editions will hereafter carry the latest news of the monster of the Andes. A special AP expedition, headed by William Mack, veteran correspondent, and equipped with radiophoto apparatus, is already flying from Panama toward the disturbed area, and his eye-witness reports are shortly anticipated, via radio.

Lundoon wiped a sudden cold wetness off his forehead, and the paper rattled in his hands. Suddenly, he had remembered that midnight conversation of four years ago, when he had suggested that science might someday create a superman—a god.

HAD Kallent indeed attempted that audacious project? The shocking certainty fastened upon him. And had the child of science revolted against its creator—after all not a god, but a colossal satan?

The black print swam before Lundoon's eyes. He saw blurred jumbled phrases. Giant wrecks train. Lifts locomotive like toy. Sixteen crushed in coach. Indians flee "El Espanto." Villages tramped by "The Terror." Hundreds dead. American "flying fortresses" from Panama to join international expedition. Continent, skeptical at first, now fear-stricken. Thou-

sands believed dead. William Mack to accompany flight. Does this monster threaten civilization?

That night was endless. Lundoon had a radio installed in the office, and left an order for the delivery of every newspaper extra when it appeared. He clipped and filed every item dealing with the giant. It was day again when he read the first dispatch from William Mack:

It is now an hour since our international expeditionary fleet lifted above the jungle-laden savanna, beside the Bay of Guyaquil. Including the six "flying fortresses"—all of the latest, sixty-ton type, mounting four light cannon each and carrying twelve tons of bombs—our force totals thirty planes.

Can we find and destroy El Espanto?

An hour ago, the writer still suspected the giant to be a figment of superstitious imagination. The Andes, however, must impress one with the insignificance of man. One is prepared to face incredible realities.

Our planes are now spread out in a huge V. Our ears are deafened with the engines. I am the guest of the Peruvian commander. The swarthy men in the cabin with me are alert—half laughing, half afraid. They jest in swift, crackling Spanish—and covertly make the cross.

We have passed to south of Chimborazo, whose awful snowy cone rises a full mile above the line of forests. Now we climb to cross the bleak inner range. The engines roar louder. Our ears ache. Snow is drifted in the pass beneath. Bitter cold penetrates our bones. Heavy with death, we almost scrape the snow.

Now the pass is behind. The

glacier slopes fall away to the bleak uplands, the *páramos*. Beyond, on the far low rim of the world, we can see the dark green of the forested *montaña*, dropping away to the Amazonian rain-forests.

The fleet wheels southward, and we come over a valley. It is a colossal trench, a black-walled gorge through riven peaks. The river, so far below, is a thin band of green-edged silver.

The men are pale and silent now. Hours of cold and strain have exhausted their first bravado. In this fantastic and colossal world—these stark peaks must have looked the same a million years ago—man is nothing, and anything is possible.

Brave and ready, the men must feel, as I do, that—

But we see the giant!

The impact upon the senses—it is sharp as a blow—destroys the last doubt. Perhaps men can never believe, until they see. But now, for us, El Espanto is real. The men are quietly preparing for the attack.

The giant is northward along the canyon, toward Quito. El Espanto! His vastness turns this mighty gorge to a mere ditch. His nude body is a shining silver-gray, as if molded of living metal.

A BEAUTIFUL figure, terrible only from its size. The form of a lean youth, superbly erect. Every muscle rounded, perfect.

He walks to meet us. Without effort, he makes at least a hundred miles an hour. His bare feet raise hurricanes of dust. His long hair, silver-gray like his body, is flung back a little by the wind of his motion.

The face is the same shining gray, the level eyes have the keen

blue of steel. An awesome face—yet to the writer it does not look cruel. Perhaps it is some bewilderment or misunderstanding that has caused this being to destroy thousands of human lives. The face reflects no malice. Rather, it shows longing and pain.

But we attack!

The dark faces of the men about me reflect my own admiration, and my own fear. But our mission is inexorable. Whatever the origin or the motives of this amazing being, civilization must defend itself.

We wheel high. Dwarfed as we climb, El Espanto seems no larger than an ordinary man, standing bewildered amid toy mountains. He is aware of us. He has stopped. His blue, terrible eyes look upward.

We dive, led by the six great flying fortresses. They release their bombs—in all, sixty one-ton “eggs” of ruin. The first bombs miss. Tiny puffs of gray dust spring up about the bare feet.

A hit!

A burst of white against the gray, naked shoulder. The giant brushes it away, bends his head to examine the spot. There is no sign. No wound. No blood—if El Espanto has blood.

Another hit—yellow flame and white smoke envelop the bent head! But the giant crouches, apparently unharmed. He leaps upward, toward another diving ship—the fourth of the flying fortresses.

He has caught the war-plane!

For a little time he stands holding it like a toy. He turns it in his fingers, ignoring the rapid-fire cannon battering at his face. Then he flings it to meet the next American bomber. They collide—we

feel the shock of a tremendous explosion.

The last flying fortress, meantime, is diving in its turn. But it doesn't drop its explosive load and veer away, as the others did. It plunges at the side of the giant's head.

The Americans are going to ram El Espanto!

A weight of sixty tons, ten of them the highest explosives known, diving at nearly four hundred miles an hour! If men can harm the giant—

They have struck!

A blinding glare. A huge burst of gray smoke. Tiny-seeming fragments of wreckage rain toward the giant's feet. He shakes his head, and straightens—unharmed, invincible.

The giant makes a warning gesture—still without anger on his face, but rather regret. The remaining planes are turning back. El Espanto is invulnerable. Quito awaits him, undefended.

CHAPTER V

THE city of Quito, however, was spared. Ascending the Cordillera Oriental, the colossal gray figure appeared upon the northern slopes of Cotopaxi. Climbing a little way up the smoking cone, El Espanto looked across the mountain-cradled city.

Desperate confusion filled the ancient streets, as the people began a frantic exodus. But the giant upon the mountain smiled. His great arms made a gesture, as if commanding the fugitives to return. Then he set his face to the eastward, and went back the way he had come.

The evening papers also reported the establishments of an international commission, to lead the world in concerted

attack against El Espanto. Members included statesman, industrialists, scientists, and military authorities, from many nations. The chairman—who had placed the entire resources of World Chemical and Steel at the commission's authority—was J. Hollworthy Cotterstone.

A later edition stated that the giant had been seen again, by a Peruvian scouting plane. The aviators stated that the giant had leveled the summit of a mountain they identified as Canusayacu, and was busy there with some colossal machines. He paused in his work, the men said, and waved them away. They departed without determining the nature or even the material of the unfinished machines.

Another extra, out before midnight, contained the story of a woman who claimed to have witnessed the giant's birth. She had been discovered by Dr. Eustaquio Griego, who had led an expedition from Lima into the remote Llanganati region, to investigate the quake that preceded the first appearance of the giant.

The Peruvian geologist found evidence of a tremendous recent upheaval on the flank of the mountain. Immediately beneath were the tracks of El Espanto—deep-pressed footprints two hundred feet in length.

Griego came upon the woman in the valley below. She was ill, lying on a cot in a deserted camp. Under his care she recovered consciousness for a short time. But she died before her story could be completed.

She was white. She claimed to be an American citizen and a native of Youngstown, Ohio. She refused to give any name except Marion. Reticent about her past, she said she had come up into the Andes with an Australian named Jethro Johnson, who was searching for Incan treasure. She had lived with Johnson in the vicinity, she ad-

mitted, for several years.

For many weeks, she told Griego, the whole region had throbbed steadily, as if to the beating of a great heart. The surface of the earth grew hot. By night, she said, strange pale lights glowed and flickered above the mountain. The native Quechuas had long since fled.

Johnson, she said, had gone out for supplies two weeks before the giant's birth. She had not seen him since. (Efforts to find Jethro Johnson had failed, the dispatch added. No one of that name was known in Ecuador.)

The giant, the woman said, was born at dawn.

Wakened by the preliminary quakes, she ran out of her tent, fearful of an avalanche. She stared up at the mountain. The color of the dawn was in the sky, and Llanganati was massed against it, black and sinister.

There was indeed a landslide. Masses of stone came roaring down. The mountain split, and intense green light burst through the fissures. Then a mighty arm came forth—the arm of El Espanto.

The arm was burning with a terrible green.

THE giant's head followed the arm. His shoulders burst through. Then he rested, until the sun had risen. At last he roused again, and dug his hands into the flanks of the mountain, and wrenched his body free.

The quake that followed flung the woman from her feet. For a time she was unconscious, of combined injury and fear. When she came to, the giant was kneeling over her. The green luminescence had gone from his body. It was the bright gray of metal, and his eyes were blue.

"His eyes were kind," the woman named Marion said. "Love was shining in them. They were like the eyes

of God. I thought they could see all my mind, and all my life. Suddenly I was ashamed of the life I had lived. And I was afraid. I cried, and covered my eyes, and lay trembling on the ground.

"Then I felt a flame against me. I looked up again. The giant was still kneeling over me. But his eyes had changed. Now they were angry, terrible. A fire shone out of them, and burned—burned—"

With those words, Dr. Greigo reported, the woman called Marion had lost consciousness again. Within a few minutes she was dead. Besides symptoms of shock and bruises, he discovered inflammations and tissue-destruction such as, he thought, might have been caused by X-rays or some other penetrating radiation.

Lundoon, in his office at the Foundation, had clipped and filed that last, most amazing item—he was reflecting upon the significant similarity of Jethro Jones and Jethro Johnson—when he heard the rap upon the door. He heard his own name, strangely and hoarsely spoken:

"Wendell!"

He stood up, wearily, beside the long ancient desk that had been Dr. Kallent's. It was littered with newspaper clippings, empty coffee cups, full ash trays and burned matches. Lundoon was red-eyed and haggard, dark stubble smudged his jaws.

He sloshed coffee out of a vacuum jug into his cup, and limped sleepily to the door. He had not recognized the hoarse voice. Someone, he supposed, with another batch of papers. The door swung open before he reached it, and the cup fell out of his hand.

A tall and ghastly figure swayed into the doorway. A long black coat muffled it, the dark hat was pulled far down. The face was bandaged white. The eyes burned through narrow slits,

like live coals.

"Kallent!" gasped Lundoon. "My God, Dr. Kallent—is it you?"

The reply was a hollow croak:

"Yes, Wendell. May I have—coffee?"

Lundoon was staring, stunned with horror. The tall man shuffled wearily to the desk. His stiff, bandaged fingers opened the vacuum jug. He lifted it in both awkward hands, and drank.

"Jethro?" whispered Lundoon. "What has happened to you?"

The other man caught the chair behind the desk. Stiffly, painfully, he lowered himself into it. He raised the steaming jug, to drink again. Then his burning eyes lifted, terrible beyond the white mask of bandage.

"I asked for Douglas," that queer voice rasped. "They tell me he is dead."

LUNDOON nodded, mute with horror.

"But it is you I came to see," the rusty tone went on. "I came to place my work in your hands. You may try to salvage it, for mankind. Or destroy it, before more harm is done."

"You are Jethro Johnson," Lundoon whispered. "You created El Espanto."

"Speak louder, my boy," said that terrible voice. "My senses are failing." A stiff muffled hand indicated the piles of clippings on the desk. "You have studied them?" rasped Kallent. "Then there isn't much to tell you. For the Child of Science was born from a word of your own."

Trembling, Lundoon sat down. The thing was incredible, even if he had already guessed it. It was hard to breathe. Staring at Kallent, he felt ill with horror. But the floor ceased to rock, and he shouted the imperative question:

"How?"

The stiff, terrible figure lurched for-

ward in the chair.

"To you, Wendell," croaked Kallent, "little explanation will be necessary—Andy reported your remarkable, and very dangerous, work with the azoic ray. You know that life is a function of the electro-chemical tensions that exist as a result of the molecular arrangement of protoplasmic matter. It is possible to reduce life to a mathematical equation."

Lundoon nodded. That discovery of Kallent's had afforded him the basis of the azoic radiation. Any force which affected those sub-molecular potentials, even slightly, destroyed life at its very origin. He listened.

"Protoplasmic life," said Kallent's husky voice, "is the expression of that fundamental equation, through one series of elements—those common at the Earth's surface, where our life originated.

"The equation, however, has other possible solutions — through combinations of other elements, in various ranges of temperature and pressure. Your suggestion, that night, was a seed.

"I was fascinated by the possibility of creating a life-form more enduring than our own. A gigantic superman, who might be the guardian, mentor, and leader of humanity. A god, born of science!

"The means were already at hand. Already I had calculated—on paper—a synthetic protoplasm that would have a thousand times the strength and stability of human flesh. Iron is the base of it, instead of water. Its energy is derived not from oxidation, but from the controlled disintegration of heavy atoms.

"I had not dared attempt any actual synthesis. My first experiments roused so much criticism. I had realized that any mistake might be final—that one cell of that new life might be mankind's doom.

"And I don't know, about reform."

Jethro Kallent sighed. His gaunt thin frame slumped down in the chair. His terrible hollow eyes stared at his bandaged hands. Lundoon waited, in a stunned and breathless awe.

"Reformers," Kallent mumbled faintly. "Peculiar creatures. Psychologists tell us they attack in others what they fear in themselves. And the world doesn't want to be changed. It's easy enough to plan a Utopia, Wendell. But not to find Utopians to fit it."

Impatiently, Lundoon prompted:

"El Espanto?"

THE thin man leaned wearily on the desk.

"I finally decided, Wendell, to follow your suggestion. The world, as Andy said, was desperately ill. The Child would be a remedy, equally desperate.

"Discretion was essential. I dared not trust even you and Andy, fully. I went to Guayaquil. Jethro Jones was a bearded, half-crazy Andean tramp, searching for Incan treasure about remote Mt. Llanganati. He warned off intruders. His real secret, however, was a laboratory hidden in a cave.

"The technique was difficult. Not the actual creation of life—we have not progressed with that beyond the viruses. The transfer, rather, from one chemical base to another. The method was to replace the familiar elements of a fertilized human cell, with the iron, the heavy metals, and the radioactive elements of the new synthetic protoplasm.

"In Guayaquil, Jethro Jones found the woman who was to be the mother of the Child. She had been unfortunate. But tests and investigation convinced me that, physically and mentally, her heritage had been superior.

"Her disasters had been clearly the fault of environment. I chose her, partly, because I thought her misfor-

tunes would emphasize to the Child the task for which he had been created—it now seems that I made a fatal error.

"Marion, when I found her, was full of bitterness against the injustice of the world. But kindness changed her. She was loyal to me at the end, when she gave my name as Johnson, and concealed facts that she might have told."

The terrible white head fell again. For a while Jethro Kallent was silent. Then through the bandages came a whisper that sounded like, "Marion."

Lundoon waited, tense with a breathless expectation.

Kallent moved stiffly at last, and resumed:

"With a small portable diamond drill—that Jethro Jones had bought to search for the lost Incan mines—I sank a boring two thousand feet into the flank of Llanganati.

"When the life-cell of the new protoplasm was safely started on its ectogenetic development, I sealed it into a gold capsule, loaded with the iron, radium, and other elements required for the first stages of growth, and lowered it into the bore.

"That was nearly three years ago. The new being began a rapid development under the mountain—I had made a dozen borings, to select a spot where the necessary elements were sufficiently abundant. The energy of accelerated radioactivity—the focal temperatures of its radiogens approach that of the Sun's interior—enabled it to fuse the surrounding rock. From the molten stone, it absorbed metallic food.

"Only the task of education remained."

Lundoon was leaning forward in his chair. As the gaunt man paused wearily, he licked his lips and gulped and started to speak. But his voice was only a stunned, incoherent little mumble. He waited again, for Kallent to go on.

"I had foreseen the problem," rasped the thin bandaged man, "and its solution. For the Child's brain is directly sensitive to certain radio wave-lengths, and radiates similar waves as it functions. With a portable transmitter, I was able to propagate signals strong enough to reach it, even through several thousand feet of stone.

"NEARLY a year had passed when I picked up the first faint disturbances, of the new brain's growing awareness. After certain difficulties, we set up a sort of half-telepathic contact.

"The Child had a queer, intuitive apprehension. Presently he seemed able to grasp my very thoughts, before I could frame them in words. He was aflame with curiosity about himself and the universe.

"For many hours a day, during the last year, I sat at the transmitter, telling him about his creation and the reason for it. I thought, Wendell, that I had made him love mankind. I was glad when his maturity approached. Because I thought that he would soon end all war and poverty and suffering. He would be an actual, physical god, stooping to aid mankind.

"As the time for the Child's birth approached, I was very happy, Wendell. Every day I talked to him, and we made bright plans for the millenium. He seemed eager to repay his debt to his creators."

Kallent sighed again, dropped his bandaged head wearily against stiff, white-swathed hands. His hollow eyes burned feverishly through the slits in his strange mask.

"It's hard to believe that, now," rasped his rusty voice. "What a fool I was! But am I completely to blame? You, yourself, Wendell, made the first suggestion—please try to remember that."

"I do," gasped Lundoon. "Go on."

CHAPTER VI

THE gaunt man lifted the vacuum jug in his stiff white hands. Trembling, gulping noisily, he drank through the mouth-slit in his uncanny white mask. At last, in a voice that had grown fainter and huskier since he began, Kallent went on:

"Marion, the mother of the Child, stayed in my camp. She had demanded ten thousand dollars, for her part, and she planned to come back to the States. I paid her the money, and told her she could go. But she stayed.

"She was no longer beautiful. The cruelties of life had dulled and warped her mind. Yet sometimes I saw in her a glimpse of the woman she might have been—a woman I might have loved, if science had left me time.

"I know now that it was a mistake to let her stay. But she had developed an almost pathetic devotion to me—no one else, she often told me, had ever been kind to her. And I had a feeling for her—half pity, perhaps. I could never analyze it. But I was glad to have her stay."

Kallent's stark ghastly hand pointed abruptly at the pile of clippings on the desk. Lundoon started, at the gesture, and a wondering horror choked him.

"She told Griego how the Child was born," his distorted voice went on. "A true account—except that I was there, at my little portable radio communicator, beside the camp. I was speaking with the Child, as he came forth from the mountain.

"It is hard to convey the strange splendor of that scene—the Child rising upright, a truly god-like being of living metal, above the tumbled slope of blackened, smoking stone that had

given him birth. You can't sense the elation that I felt.

"Part of it was a selfish pride, because I had made the Child. But most of it was the triumphant knowledge that now men had a real and living god, to lead them into a better world.

"The Child's first desire was to see his mother. He came down the mountain, starting new avalanches, and knelt down over our camp. He looked down at Marion. She was lying beside the tent—she had fainted, I think, from the terror of the Child's emergence.

"Through the communicator, he spoke to me:

" 'This is my mother?'

" 'Yes, my son.'

" 'Is she hurt?'

"He bent closer above her. A tender smile was on his great face, and his blue eyes were softly shining. He put down his hand—each finger so much larger than her body—and then withdrew it, as if afraid that he would injure her.

" 'She can't be hurt much,' I began. 'Just afraid—'

" 'Wait,' the Child's words came to me. 'I can see her mind—all her life.' Then a look of hurt bewilderment came over that sublime, magnetic face, and the Child asked me: 'Why was my mother treated so?'

"I saw the anger rising into his eyes.

" 'Why have men been cruel to her? Why was she punished, for deeds she could not avoid. Why was she hungry, when men had food? Why did she lie ill, when men could have healed her? Why did men drive her from her home, to a foreign land?'

"His eyes lifted to me. Their tremendous blue depths seemed to flame with his anger—and my skin was stinging already from their actual radiation. His thoughts came through the communicator, like a deep and dreadful voice:

"My father, you are a man. I thought the other men would be as you are. I thought I should be proud to serve them with the strength that you have given me. But now that I have seen them through my mother's mind—and seen their cruel injustice to one whose only crime was love—I cannot serve them."

"I TRIED to defend mankind. Surely, I said, the world was not perfect. There was injustice everywhere, needless suffering, vast ignorance and folly and futility. But all this, I said, only showed our need for the strength and intelligence and leadership of the Child.

"But he stood up, making a sudden wind that flattened everything in the camp. He stood for a moment, with his angry eyes blazing down at me.

"Such vermin are not worth leading," came his furious words. "They ought to be destroyed."

"And the Child went away—the very Earth trembling to the violence of his anger. Probably you know more than I of what has happened since. He has trampled a village and wrecked a train. He was stirred to fresh anger by a useless air attack."

The hoarse unnatural voice of Kallent had grown very faint. Now it paused. For a time his burning eyes looked out of their white slits, at his quivering, bandaged hands. Lundoon merely waited, speechless from wonder and pity and dread.

"When the Child was gone," the gaunt man at last resumed, his rasping voice a little stronger, "I went back to Marion. We both had been severely burned, by the radiation from the Child's eyes.

"Perhaps I should have foreseen the danger. The radioactive protoplasm of the Child emanates destructive radiations, as our bodies do heat. The

effect had been increased by the nervous excitation of his retinal rods and cones—the Child's anger, unconsciously and without intention, had destroyed us.

"Anyhow, I saw that we both were doomed. The rays had penetrated our bodies, injuring all the tissue. There was no hope—"

Lundoon made a protesting gesture.

"But, surely—"

Kallent shook his bandaged head.

"I think I qualify as an expert on the tissue-effects of radiation. I have used every treatment that my knowledge suggests—just to gain the time to reach you, Wendell. To place the Child's future in your hands."

The bandaged man dropped his head, for a little time, on his stiff arms. His breath was audible, now, slow and wheezing. Lundoon waited for him to rest. At last he looked up again, and Lundoon asked:

"What am I to do?"

"The Child is in your hands." Kallent's voice was louder again, but forced and harsh. "I have brought my notes, and the portable communicator. You can speak with my son, try to win his good will for mankind.

"Or—if you must, Wendell—you can kill him."

Lundoon stared, incredulous.

"Kill El Espanto?" he gasped. "How?"

"With your azoic ray," rasped Kallent. "Just one octave higher than for men. But promise me—" The strained voice shook. "Promise me that you will not kill him unless you must."

"I promise," said Lundoon.

"Because he is my son." The voice of Kallent was no more than a rustling, faint and far away. "And because he is a god. Take my hand, and promise." Lundoon gripped the stiff, bandaged fingers.

"I promise," he shouted again.

He thought the burning eyes of Kallent smiled behind the mask. The bandaged fingers fumbled in Kallent's coat and found a tiny vial, poured white grains from it into the vacuum jug. Lundoon grasped the jug, protesting:

"Wait—"

The terrible eyes stopped him.

"My last task is done," the gaunt man croaked. "And I can endure no more. Let me drink—"

Lundoon released the jug. The bandaged hands lifted it, trembling so in their eagerness that the liquid death sloshed noisily within. Ill, Lundoon looked away. He heard a loud gulp, a rasping breath:

"My son—save my son!"

The vacuum flask crashed against the floor.

CHAPTER VII

TWENTY days later, Lundoon stepped down on the airfield at Guayaquil. His heavy Gladstone contained the equipment Kallent had used for communication with the Child. Clipped to the inside pocket of his brown sports jacket was an aluminum cylinder, the size of a fountain pen.

The cylinder was a radiation-bomb. When set off by the brass detonator screwed into the end of the tube, its forty-gram charge would complete an atomic reaction, emanating that octave of the azoic radiation fatal to the Child.

In the building, Lundoon made inquiries.

"*¡Sí, señor,*" said the vivacious Latin beauty behind the tobacco stand. "El Espanto is still upon his mountain. He is busy, the people say, building some so-large machine." She favored Lundoon with a smile. "I am glad that he doesn't go courting, like other young men. *Porqué,* unawares, he might

crush his sweetheart under his toe."

Her laugh was a tinkle of silver, but Lundoon, heard the ragged discord of unspoken fear.

Carrying the brown Gladstone, he approached a window.

"*¡Sí, señor,*" the agent said, "we charter planes for private flights. Where does the *señor* wish to be conveyed?"

"To the mesa called *la vicuña*, beside the mountain Canusayacu."

"Canu—" The agent's voice failed upon the second syllable. "The *señor* isn't aware—that is the fortress of El Espanto?"

"Nevertheless," Lundoon said gravely, "I have mining interests there. I must go, to protect them."

"Impossible, *señor!*" The agent flung up his arms. "El Espanto would destroy the plane!"

"I have banking references. I'll buy the plane."

"*¡Sí,* the plane. But the pilot! Who would risk his soul—?"

"Surely—" Lundoon said. "For American dollars—"

There was, the agent suggested, *un Americano*, who had no soul to risk. He might be found at some cantina in the city. Now, if the *señor* Burns were not too drunk to fly—

"Find him," said Lundoon.

Sammy Burns was drunk enough to take the chance, and not too drunk to fly—as he explained, "Hell, it ain't noon yet." The battered plane took off. The Andes were first a mighty, snow-crowned barrier ahead, then a white and cragged waste beneath, and then a wall behind.

"Stranger," Sammy Burns shouted at last, "I said I'd fly you to hell for a thousand bucks, and no questions asked or answered. Well, there you are. That's Canusayacu."

Still a hundred miles away, the mountain was blue with haze. But Lundoon

could see that it had been truncated. Upon the leveled summit stood colossal machines. A skeletal tower, taller than the old peak had been, was spindle-shaped in outline.

SEEMING small amid his stupendous mysterious works, and yet clearly visible at a hundred miles, Lundoon could see the nude gray magnificent form of the busy Child.

"Land me on the mesa," shouted Lundoon. "As close as you can."

Sammy Burns lit a cigarette, leaned smiling to offer one. But Lundoon could feel his tenseness, glimpse the staring terror in his eyes.

He set down the little plane at last, upon a *pajano*: an open, treeless plateau, tufted with yellow *ichu* grass. From its edge a great chasm dropped. Below naked boulder-fields rolled the far green of forests. Beyond, twenty miles away, stood truncated Canusaya-cu.

"So long, *amigo*," shouted the pilot. "Don't get too rough with him."

The little plane bumped into the air, and whirled away as if on wings of fear. It was cold, at this altitude, even in the sun's white glare. Lundoon's heart thumped painfully from the small exertion of climbing a little grassy ridge, from which he could look across the valley.

For a long time he stood there, staring through binoculars at the busy Child. It seemed to Lundoon that his mighty hands molded the stone of the mountain as a man molds clay—and he knew that those lofty, enigmatic constructions were of something stronger than any common metal.

Lundoon's task was simple.

He had merely to make this gray splendid god the slave of mankind. Or, if the Child refused, if all his persuasions and his threats were to fail, if nothing else was left—then he had to

kill the Child.

A simple task—but infinitely appalling.

The long afternoon slipped away. Lundoon stopped his watching long enough to open the Gladstone and set up the radio communicator. But still he could not bring himself to speak. His mind was dulled with awe. Doubts rose against his resolution.

The Child was perfect, he thought, eternal. Truly, a god. It might be that the entire purpose of all mankind, in the cosmic telology, had been only his creation. What possible right had men to enslave or destroy him?

The sun dropped beyond the westward summits. For a brief time the Child's machines were stark enigmas against the flaming Andean dusk. Then it was dark. But a pale green, that had been invisible by day, shone from the Child's body—a secondary emanation, Lundoon supposed, from his radioactive vital processes—and he worked on without rest at his unknown enterprise.

The icy night wind of the *páramos* came down from the high glaciers. Lundoon stirred himself at last, to put on a heavy coat, eat and drink hastily from the supplies he had brought, and then to inspect again the small aluminum tube that held the Child's death.

Again Lundoon hesitated. He shuddered, from something more than cold. But at last he closed the transmitter key, and said quietly:

"Hello. A man is speaking."

THE valley was a black sea. Beyond it, the nude glowing form of the Child was motionless for an instant, amid the great machines that loomed against the tropic stars. Then blue flaming eyes discovered Lundoon.

"Man, I am glad you have come." The giant's lips did not move, but the voice in the phones was deep and clear. "I wanted to warn your race, so that

you may prepare to die."

Lundoon drew a long uneven breath, of the icy mountain air.

"You are going to destroy mankind—your makers?"

"Not from malice," said the phones. "My first anger at you is forgotten." The Child's flaming eyes lifted, toward the tropic stars. "But I see other worlds, and beings upon them that seem closer kin than men. I am building a ship, to seek them."

The green giant touched the spindle-shaped skeleton.

"My ship can't be launched without the liberation of vast energies. I shall curb them as much as may be. But I think the recoil, the disturbance of air and sea and the Earth's crust beneath the blast of atomic force that drives my ship, will surely be fatal to your puny race."

The issue appeared sharp to Lundoon as the night wind's chill. It was the life of man or the life of the Child. But what right, he asked himself uneasily, had he to judge?

At last, trembling, he said:

"So you will destroy your makers?"

"I am sorry," said the Child. "But it is not at my request that I exist."

Lundoon reached under his coat. His numbed fingers found the studs on the detonator of the radiation-bomb. He could set it off, he thought, before any agency of the Child could cross the intervening miles.

Across the black chasm, that immense shining figure jerked as if with surprise. Lundoon knew that the Child had perceived his action and its meaning. But the giant made no hostile move. From the phones, the deep voice asked:

"Why do you delay my death? You know you can't coerce me. I'll be no slave to your miserable breed!"

"I know," Lundoon said slowly. "But still I'm not sure that I'll destroy

you."

The shining face of the Child looked puzzled.

"Why should you let me destroy your race?"

"I've no right to kill you," Lundoon said. "Men are chained to this planet, doomed with it. You may lead a greater life, eternal as the universe. You are a more splendid being, above the baseness, the uncertainty, the conflicts that torment mankind—"

"Wait." Beyond the black chasm, the Child lifted a shining arm. "I'm a man. Suddenly, now, I see that. With the same weakness, the same selfishness. But you have made my plan impossible. I couldn't accept the willing sacrifice of the race that made me."

The Child lifted a colossal beam, that he had been about to set in place upon the space ship. For a little time he held it, as if uncertainly. Then he flung it down the mountain slope. The plateau shook to its fall.

Suddenly it occurred to Lundoon that he ought to suspect a trick. The voice in the phones said promptly:

"No, neither of us has lied."

He knew then that the Child was above deception. A slow elation began to rise from his new sense of communion with the supernal mind beyond the chasm. Here was a god, indeed, able to satisfy all the needs of mankind.

"The man who was my father," that great voice came again, "told me of all he planned for me to do. He wanted me to be the leader and the judge and the servant of mankind. You have made me see that I must do that."

CHAPTER VIII

FOR a long time, that night, Lundoon talked to the Child. The shining giant upon the far-mountain ceased to be strange and terrible.

They were like two men, calmly discussing a practical matter across a table. The plan they made was simple. The Child would talk to men, and they would follow him.

All the rest would come from that. But, first, there were two preliminary steps. The Child must build a radio station, powerful enough to carry their appeal to all the world. And he must bathe his body with a solution which would absorb those deadly radiations, which had been fatal to Kallent and the woman Marion. Meantime, for his own safety, Lundoon must wait where he was.

Dawn had come when their communion ended, and the Child went back among his machines, to begin his new tasks. Lundoon found himself stiff with cold. He found dry brush to make a fire, and warmed himself, and heated food. Then, lying in the direct cold sun, he wrapped himself in his coat and went to sleep—to dream of the new era coming, of men beneath the Child.

The roar of a motor woke him, to the glare of noon. He peered across to the flat-topped mountain, looking for the Child. The giant was invisible. But, among the machines, was a new immense black cylinder. He supposed that must be the tank in which the Child was treating his body, to stop the harmful rays.

Dazzled, it was a little time before he could find the plane. But it landed, and came bumping toward him across the clumps of sere yellow grass. Out of it sprang Gina Arneth.

She wore no prosaic flying togs, but something of shimmering silk. Her hair was amber flame. In the pale, passionate oval of her face, her eyes were still pools of violet midnight. In a glad husky voice, she sobbed:

"Wendy—"

Like a wild cold wind, a great sudden fear swept Lundoon. His knees were

weak, as he stumbled to meet the girl. He knew that her coming promised disaster to the Child, and all their splendid plan.

But she was in his arms, and in his blood.

"Wendy, I've brought you a letter." Her whisper was swift and uneasy. "Don't be angry, please. This was the only way they would let me come. They learned about Kallent, you see, and traced you here."

Lundoon ripped open the stiff yellow envelope. He saw the printed name, Cotterstone, and the sheet trembled in his fingers. He read the bold black script:

Lundoon: A thankful world will reward your destruction of the giant with a lifetime annuity of one hundred million dollars, the yearly payment of that sum being guaranteed by the great nations.

—J. Hollworthy Cotterstone.

He slowly crumpled the heavy yellow sheet, and looked up into the anxious violet eyes of Gina Arneth. He smiled a faint tired smile.

"I'm sorry you came, Gina," he said softly. "Because I loved you—too much to expect you to stoop to this. I think I ought to kill you, Gina—there's an automatic in my bag. But I'm going to let you go back to Cotterstone. Tell him again: no sale."

HER violet eyes were level, unflinching.

"You don't understand," she told him quietly. "Cotterstone knows now that I really love you. He's afraid that I would betray him, to you and the giant. He told me not to come back—not until the giant is dead. He'd kill me, if I did.

"Cotterstone's an emperor, Wendy." Her voice was low and urgent. "He knows that the giant threatens his power—he has an idea of why Kallent created the giant. And he's fighting,

now, to save his empire from any reform the giant might lead."

Tears shone in her eyes.

"You see, Wendy, I can't go back. He's ruthless. His enemies just vanish." Her persuasive fingers caught his arm. "May I stay, Wendy? If you are going to join the giant—and make the world over, as Cotterstone fears—I want to be on your side. Because—really—I love you."

His dark head bent slowly, half reluctantly.

He whispered, "You may stay."

"Wendy—my darling!"

She flung ecstatic arms around his neck. He kissed her, thirstily. Still he felt misgivings. He could not trust her, fully—he knew how much that reward must mean to her. But he began to talk about the plan. When she understood its reach and its splendor, she couldn't fail to be loyal.

Gina Arenth was a bright and joyous companion. She listened eagerly to all he said, and her acceptance seemed complete. Her presence on that bleak mesa, Lundoon thought, made him happier than he had ever been.

"I love you, Gina," he told her again. "If you'll really come with me—and join the Child—it will be more than I ever hoped for."

"I've done that, Wendy—for I love you, too."

Her lips, and her warm, eager body, repeated her answer.

Still, when the sun set, the Child had not emerged from that huge black cylinder. Lundoon set out a simple meal. They ate, and presently—when even Lundoon had tired of his visions of the bright tomorrow dawning—they slept.

Lundoon to a sense of ineffable joy—from a dream that he was walking, hand in hand with Gina Arneith, through the halls of a splendid crystal palace. He whispered her name. Then,

numb with sudden fear, he knew that she had gone.

His first conscious move was to grope for the little aluminum tube. It was gone. He knew instantly that Gina had taken it—that its loss meant the death of the Child.

Lundoon had not spoken of the radiation-bomb. Some tiny unconscious gesture must have betrayed its position. But Gina— Incredulity stunned him. Still he could feel the laughing joy of her nearness, her love like a flame. It simply couldn't all have been a ruse, a lie.

But the bomb was gone.

Then he heard the motor again, and realized that it had waked them. In the cold night wind that came down from the glaciers, the stiff motor was reluctant to start. It coughed and died. Again he heard the starter.

DESPERATELY, Lundoon stumbled upright. He found his bag. The contents were turned out. Gina evidently had searched for the gun. But he found it safe in the little hidden pocket that had brought it through the customs.

The cold motor caught at last, roared.

Lundoon worked the slide to load the gun. He ran stiffly toward the plane. Pale in the light from the instruments, he saw Gina's face. Intent over the controls, she was unaware of him.

The flat gun came up in his hand, grew steady. Then Gina's oval face looked up, and she smiled. Her beauty meshed him, a clinging web he could not break. The plane lurched forward, rushed past him. It was a diminishing sound in the night.

The gun dropped out of Lundoon's hand.

The Child was doomed.

Regret more bitter than the night

wind pursued Lundoon across the black plateau. His shoulders sagged beneath a weight of guilt that seemed too great to bear. His tortured brain could find but one possible atonement.

Staggering against the freezing wind, he went back to the camp—now starkly desolate, since Gina was gone. He found flashlight, notebook, pen. For a time, with numb fingers and straining eyes, he was busy.

He set down the formula for generation of the azoic radiation. An untested force. And there was no time for experiment, for selection and precision. It would be merely a hasty blotting of other life from the Earth, so that the Child might survive.

Lundoon was sick, shuddering, but he spurred himself to the task. When mankind was composed of such individuals as himself and Cotterstone and Gina Arneith, when it exiled Jethro Kallent and murdered Andrew Douglas, when it fought the Child through fear not of evil but of good—then the thing he did was right.

As he calculated and set down the last equations, he felt a tremor of the earth. The Child had already left the other mountain, and was striding toward him through the dark valley. The lean majestic body still shone, but the green had changed to a pure and luminous white.

Lundoon reeled to the communicator, to blurt out his confession:

"Master, I have given your life away—"

But the Child's deep voice spoke gravely from the phones:

"I know what you have done. And I see the weapon that you have prepared to give me, to enable me to annihilate your kind tonight."

Lundoon tried to shake away his awe.

"But you must hasten!" he cried. "Before your enemies can strike. Go

back to your machines, and make the generator. I'll read you the specifications."

But the Child came on, with an unhurried stride, across the valley. The blue shining eyes were calm and not afraid. The edge of a level hand was set against the cliff. Lundoon, obeying a nod, leaped upon it, carrying the communicator. He was lifted into the night.

THE Child stood still. For a little time the blue radiant eyes rested upon Lundoon, and then they lifted toward the tropic sky.

"I have not lived," the deep voice throbbed in the phones. "For I have been alone. Splendid visions have beckoned to me, and I have not attained them. And now I must die."

"No!" A panic shook Lundoon, standing in the bitter wind upon that vast and luminous palm. "Use the ray—or, if you will not, the range of the bomb is limited. If you fled to the polar continent, perhaps, or into the sea—even yet there might be time!"

"No," that great voice said slowly. "I am a man. I am the stuff of mankind—strength and weakness mingled. Any violence would destroy the strength. The best that I can do is leave its memory to my fellow men."

And the Child added, presently:

"All our plan was wrong. It had to fail. Man cannot be uplifted by force. He can only grow from within. He must have leaders, but the very need calls them forth. I am no more than another man, and less than others that shall come. My small part, now, is to die." The shining hand moved beneath Lundoon. "I shall set you down, and wait—"

"No," Lundoon protested. "Please hold me."

He wanted to urge the Child again to save his life. But thinking of

another, two thousand years ago, whose death had been the beginning of a new faith, he couldn't speak. The Child's eyes lifted to the starry sky again, and the deep voice said:

"You know, I have perceptions more delicate than men's. Now, looking upon a vast planet that circles another sun—"

At that moment Lundoon saw a new violet star in the west. An intense flaming point, it fell in a long swift arc. Lundoon knew that it was the radiation bomb, dropped from a plane. It had the same color, he thought, as the eyes of Gina Arneth.

The Child's bright palm quivered beneath him, and was suddenly rigid as iron. The pure white glow of the great body was abruptly extinguished, as the vital radioactive processes ceased. The blue light faded from the uplifted eyes.

The Child was dead.

CHAPTER IX

SHIVERING with the night wind of the *jaramos*, Lundoon crouched down in a furrow of the flat dead hand. At last the cold dawn came, and the sun gilded the colossal statue of gray iron that stood on the edge of the bleak plateau.

Soon a small white-winged plane soared over the peaks from the direction of Quito. With a reckless daring, that ignored the perils of altitude and blustering wind, it was landed upon the too-small space of the level palm.

Gina Arneth ran eagerly to meet Lundoon.

"I was so afraid, Wendy!" She clung to him, against a rough blast of the wind. "Afraid the giant would fall on you—"

Stiffly, dully, he pushed her away from him.

"Listen, Wendy—please!" Her hurt voice was half swept away on the wind. "Everything's all right. I told Cotterstone you'd accepted, stayed behind just to keep the giant from suspecting. So the money's waiting—a hundred million a year!"

She tugged at his arm.

"Come on—before the plane blows away. They sent a special radio. All the world is waiting for you to tell how you destroyed the giant. And Mr. Cotterstone—"

"Get away," he said faintly.

She saw the bleak agony on his face.

"Wendy!" Her voice was sharp with concern. "Darling, are you ill?"

"Blood money!" He staggered before the wind, toward the iron hand's edge. The girl dragged him back, herself white with fear of the gulf below. "A better price," he muttered, "than Judas got."

"Come on," she begged him.

"I'm going to jump." His voice was dead. "After Andy and Dr. Kallent and the Child."

"No, Wendy—no!" Her tone was thin with dread. "You can't do that—not now." She pulled, against the wind.

Lundoon looked at her, bleakly.

"No, Gina, I won't. I've got to go on living. All of them left me their jobs. Now I've got the Child's. I'll have to carry on with that—as far as a human can." He nodded soberly. "To begin with, there's the cold anti-virus—"

He lifted a hand toward that gray colossal head, and his lips smiled faintly. Then he followed Gina Arneth to the tiny plane, which, even in the hollow of the palm, was shuddering before the wind. Gina Arneth gave him the microphone.

"Hello, Cotterstone—"

His voice was hoarse and choked.

"Yes, the Child of Science is dead."

A god, he died so that men might live. You killed him, Cotterstone—and that is a murder that even you can hardly forget. But I am to blame, for letting the weapon reach your hands. I'm going to spend the rest of my life trying to do the Child's work. And this will serve notice that I'm not going to touch the murder-money."

HE dropped the microphone, and looked at the breathless girl.

"Drop me, somewhere, Gina," he said faintly. "On some beach or highway. Because this has got to be the end of Lundoon. He has too much to live down—and Cotterstone would never let him rest, with the azoic ray. But somebody else can go on—somewhere."

"Drop me and leave me." His trembling hand closed desperately on the gun in his pocket. "Then you can go back—" His voice was a tired bitter rasp. "Back to Cotterstone and his bloody millions—"

She sat rigid, stricken, in the air-coupe beside him.

"Don't—Wendy!" Agony sobbed in her voice. "Please—don't rub it in." Wide and black and dry, her eyes looked into his face. "I see now that I have done a dreadful thing." Her voice was quiet and low. "I know that it can't ever be forgiven or undone. It will be a burden on me, always. But may I go with you, Wendy—and try to do the little that I can."

For a long time Lundoon sat as rigid as the gray iron form of the Child. The wind shook and lifted the plane on the great open palm. Lundoon looked up through the glass at the majestic still features of the child, and the stern bitterness melted slowly from his eyes. He put his arm around the weeping girl.

"I forgive you, Gina," he whispered. "I think the Child would want me to."

The Child's frozen body was decreed

public property by the government of Ecuador. Peru, however, made a counter-claim, since it stood upon disputed territory. Both nations armed for war.

The quarrel was finally arbitrated, however, and both parties sold their claims to meet munitions bills. The buyer turned out to be a subsidiary of World Chemical and Steel—which had sold the armament.

It proved a shrewd investment. Besides the almost worthless iron, the Child's body contained enough radium, platinum, osmium, and other valuable metals to yield a net return of eighty dollars a ton. The net profit to the Cotterstone interests was estimated at more than two billion dollars.

One fragment, however, was preserved from the furnace. Anonymously purchased from Mr. Cotterstone, the metal was cut into a massive twenty-foot pillar, and erected upon the spot where the Child had died. Into its rustless gray metal was cut:

IN MEMORY OF THE CHILD
OF SCIENCE—A MAN WHO
DIED THAT MEN MIGHT LIVE

A landing field was leveled on the bleak plateau beside the gray pillar. Among the visitors who came one day was a certain Dr. Smith—who, if he had been less self-effacing, might have been recognized as the conqueror of the common cold. He was accompanied by his lovely flame-haired wife, and their son.

Staring across at the mysterious remains of those colossal black machines, whose adamant material had defied Cotterstone's salvage crews, the blue-eyed boy listened eagerly to their stories of the Child.

"Dad!" he cried. "Mom, when I grow up, I want to be like the Child was—strong and wonderful and good." Dr. Smith and Gina smiled.

WE, THE OTHER-PEOPLE

By **BRUCE MANCHESTER**

Author of "Invasion from Mars," etc.

Other-People, you remember they called them, those creatures that made up the crew of the first spaceship to reach the Earth. . . . It was no wonder you didn't dream them, judging from the way they looked and acted, that they'd turn out as they have. . . .



Those machine-driven monsters would come then, so loathsome, so cruel, so blundering!

A SECOND thought explains why the paramount attitude toward the first ship from beyond space was one of relief.

Telescopes had picked up that egg-shaped invader far away—it was, as most readers will remember, a good mile long and rather more than half as thick. First it was called a meteor, then, as its

size became computable, a fugitive from the asteroid. Wonder deepened into concern, for it was point-blanked at Earth, or rather at the position on Earth's orbit which both bodies would occupy on April 24 of that year.

Astronomers made some rather faulty estimates of weight, mass and speed, and announced that the collision would

be most serious. Even if it struck the solid center of a continent, there would be a great rent in Earth's crust, cities and fields obliterated, thousands slain, perhaps volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. If it plunged, as seemed more likely, into the more spacious ocean, every coast would be swept by some sort of tidal waves, every ship would be smashed or sunk, and . . . the papers shuddered over it. So did the stock markets.

But by April 20 a new wonder rose, complicated, as has been mentioned, by deep relief. The headlong rush of the great ovoid was slackening, nobody knew why. It continued to slacken, to an ethereal canter, then to a trot. By noon of April 24 it entered the atmospheric envelope so gently that it gained little or no frictional heat, did not even glow. By seven-forty that spring evening it had settled, gently as a plume of down, at the northern edge of the municipal airport of Wichita, Kansas, almost in the geographical center of the United States.

The attendants and aviation weather-observers were first to reach it, and they first startled the world by the truth they shouted back to others—the immense egg was artificial. And not metal, either, or not Earth metal. It was tougher than any alloy known to engineering, but quite elastic. As a matter of fact, it had settled and squashed down, like a half-inflated bladder, so that it looked now as if the grandfather of all mushrooms was pushing its cap through the Kansas prairie grass.

Police Chief O. W. Watson very properly sent a detail of police in radio cars, and these made a close and fairly accurate survey. The port attendants were right, the thing was as tough as metal and as elastic as rubber, and it was certainly artificial—the straight lines of joined integument and rivet-like studs assured them of that. The

only openings were little cylindrical protuberances, pierced like gun-muzzles, each gleaming within as though set with transparent material. They might be either weapons or observation points. The police stood by for further observation or possible trouble, as did later two hastily mobilized companies of the 137th Infantry, Kansas National Guard, and an armed volunteer party of R. O. T. C. students from Wichita Municipal University. Before midnight a special plane had landed across the field, bearing Governor Simon Carnot from Topeka, several military observers, and two professors from the science department of Kansas University.

But the first scientist on the scene had already threaded the line of police and militia pickets and was tapping, with careful courage, at a great sealed-down patch that might or might not be a doorway.

DANTON CAREWE GROUND optical lenses for a living but his passion was astronomy. In the back yard of his little cottage on North Saint Francis Avenue he had assembled, painfully but accurately, a very good telescope. He had watched the approaching mass for days, and had wondered—for he read, and to a great extent believed, the science-fiction magazines—if it were not a ship from some world afar. When, on the night of April 24, the first extra edition of the *Wichita Eagle* shouted its banner of STRANGE SKY CRAFT LANDS HERE, Danton Carewe got into his little old car and went to the airport. He was a slim, swarthy man of forty or perhaps fifty, and somewhere he had learned to lurk and scout. He gained the side of the huge visitor unchallenged. At once he knocked for admittance or, at least, recognition.

And the thing opened under his inquisitive knuckles, opened not by a swinging panel, but by the whisking

away of a door-sized portion of the hull. The action was of snapping abruptness, like the violent upflight of a faulty window blind. Carewe, whose eyes were notably good for an optical supply man, had no trouble in making out the details of a human figure confronting him.

Carewe's first cry was, "You're a man!"

"You . . . 're a man," replied the stranger softly.

"Of course," said Carewe.

"Of course?" It was a question; and a hand, firm but not unfriendly, took Carewe by the elbow. He let himself be drawn into the darkness of the shell, along a corridor with a tinny-sounding floor, and into a chamber beyond, where, on cylindrical stools, sat many beings.

IT is hardly necessary to remind the readers of how those creatures, the crew of the space-vessel, appeared to this first Terrestrial observer. But it noted once more that they were human, in appearance and according to later biological tests. They stood erect on two straight legs, though they were as lean as Egyptian mummies and the tallest of them was no taller than Carewe, who was five feet nine. Their clothing, tight and gay-colored, was no more bizarre to Carewe than might have been the costume of the Italian Renaissance. Their skin was banana-yellow with a green glow to it, their hands had each six fingers and a long, delicate thumb. Above interesting faces that suggested big, shrewd bull-frogs, their craniums were as pointed and shallow as those of the veriest apathetic idiot.

"Of course?" said his guide again, very expectantly.

Carewe saw that he was expected to say on. He therefore assumed the responsibility of welcoming the strangers, in the name of his country, his race and his planet. We know that it was a very

fine speech, for it exists today as exactly memorized by those who heard it. After he finished, there was a little buzz of applauding comment, in a liquid, multi-pitched language. Then one or two addressed him in English.

Their first words were few and stiff, but, as Carewe made reply, they seemed to command a greater vocabulary. Nobody asked him to sit down, and so he found a seat for himself. At the end of an hour, one of the more richly dressed of the shallow-pates was able to clear up a seeming paradox.

"Yes, we are from far off—from a galaxy beyond yours. And we have come past many worlds and many systems, looking for a race like ourselves."

He went on to say that, in a universe so infinite of size and variety, two of everything were possible—even races of men. Carewe was inclined to agree, for he had read once (was it in Huxley?) that an office-full of monkeys, strumming on typewriters long enough, would by aimless trial and error produce the entire text of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

"We have come here," the speaker was continuing, "to find a race not only similar, but helpful. An—an ally, I think, is your word." He paused to gaze at Danton Carewe. "Tell me, are there other skulls as large as yours? And are there brains in those skulls?"

When Carewe said that there were, the strangers prattled together. Then his interviewer, whose name, it appeared, was Huil, addressed him once more:

"I am about to give you, to teach you—no, I cannot say, but I shall show. Carewe, look at me."

Carewe did so, and the vertical-pupilled eyes he met grew instantly jewel-brilliant, penetrating. There was a moment of radiant warmth and bright, blinding color, then normalcy again. "No," Huil was saying. "No. My associates tell me to wait. Carewe, we

must talk to other people of yours. To your rulers, your teachers; is that possible?"

It was possible, in the early dawn, when Governor Carnot and the university men arrived at the door of the vessel and spoke with Huil. Peace and friendship were pledged on both sides, in English which was spoken as ably by Huil, twelve hours on Earth, as by the governor or, for that matter, by the professors.

ANXIOUS themselves to gain acquaintance and information, the strangers yet found time to tell their own story. They came, said Huil, their chief and spokesman, from a world in a far galaxy, so far that its position made very little difference. Attacked by a race from a neighboring planet of their system, they were hard pressed to defend themselves, and in desperation had fitted out this expedition to seek help. Out-travelling light by a cutting of space-arcs—"You will understand how, some day," said Huil parenthetically to Governor Carnot, who grew more puzzled at the promise—and examining world after world, through their television devices, for possible friends. Earth, as they had said to Carewe, had filled them with hope.

A reporter from the *Kansas City Star* dubbed the strangers Other-People, and the name stuck to them.

There were twenty-one Other-People—they counted by sevens—and they gladly accepted an invitation to stay in Wichita's best hotel. After the passage of days, they were able to walk the streets without attracting crowds too great. Scientists they admitted to their ship, and books have been written about their space-flying engines, their rigid living quarters suspended within the great elastic rind, their machines for re-forming all waste products again into food, fuel, water and air, their modes of

living and their tastes and reactions. But meanwhile, Governor Carnot and his aides had sent for a new sort of expert—the psychologist. To a body of brain surgeons, alienists and psycho-analytic researchers, Huil had something to say. They met in the drawing room of his hotel suite.

"It is about your minds and ours," began Huil. "You have been surprised that our brain-pans are so small. We have been astounded that yours are so large. My brain tissue would be no more than one-twelfth, in weight and volume, of your average; yet we match you mentally in a variety of ways, and here and there we surpass you. And I am sure that you would like an explanation."

"We would," said Dr. Gondor of New York, and he spoke for the group.

"I have here," resumed Huil, "the proper parable." He took from a center-table a pair of small iron bars. "Two magnets, gentlemen. One is considerably larger than the other, as you observe. Now, then: this third bit of metal, an unmagnetized piece of iron, I touch with the larger magnet."

There was a little snap as contact was made, and for a moment the lump seemed to adhere strongly. But, as Huil elevated his magnet, the weight of the attached piece asserted itself. Slowly, almost regretfully, it dragged itself loose and thudded back on the table.

"You have all observed?" inquired Huil. "Now, let us try with the smaller magnet."

He did not have to touch the lump. It seemed to spring upward and meet the approaching bar. Huil's six-fingered hands tugged hard before he separated the two pieces of iron.

"Well, then," he said, in a manner almost pedagogical, "the explanation, Dr. Gondor?"

Dr. Gondor was a heavy-set, white-haired man, without too much patience

in such matters. "It doesn't need a great deal of rationalization," he growled. "The smaller magnet had a higher power."

"Yes, but how is that higher power achieved?" pursued Huil. "Wait, I have asked my earliest Terrestrial friend, Mr. Danton Carewe, to be present. There you sit, Carewe; why is the smaller magnet the most powerful?"

"I'm no magnetic engineer," replied Carewe simply, "but I remember hearing, in school, that the crystals of iron take up a certain pattern or relationship—"

"Exactly, exactly. And the more strict that relationship, the more universal that disciplined activity in the particles"—Huil broke off. "Let me clarify my example. For 'particles' of iron, substitute 'cells' of brain tissue. We Other-People have magnetized brains, so to speak. Our equipment is smaller, but every cell is at work in it."

"I can see that," put in Gondor suddenly. "It's a recognized fact that only part of the human brain functions at a time."

"Among us Other-People, every cell functions every moment," Huil told him. "Witness the swift learning of your language. Witness our rapid approach toward appreciation of your attitudes and learnings. Not only can we learn, but we can transmit."

He drew himself up and spoke impressively:

"If we desired, we could awaken and whip every cell of your brains into action."

"You could?" almost roared Dr. Gondor. "Make us think—like you?"

HUIL grinned like a frog in a cartoon and shook his head. "No, Doctor. Not like us. Your twelvefold brain-masses would be twelve times our betters. The process is a simple one, a mental rousing to sympathy—again let

me cite the parallel of the magnet which, rubbing the ordinary metal, gives it a like power." He gazed around, to make sure that all understood. "But now I shall shift the simile. The power would not go from my mind to one mind alone; no, it would be like the broadcast of one of your radio stations. Each human brain of all your Earth has a certain basic attunement to other brains—"

"True, true," mumbled a psychiatrist near the door. "Those experiments in thought-transference at Duke University prove it."

"So that," continued Huil, "to waken one brain to power would be to waken all."

"It would?" cried Gondor, rising excitedly. "Look here, let's do it at once. I'll be the subject, and you—"

"No," said Huil again. "Once, with my friend Danton Carewe, I was ready to attempt it. Something made my companions withhold me. That something was prescience. Look at this object which you call a newspaper."

He took it from the table and unfolded it.

"War," he read aloud from the headlines. "Conquest. Oppression of the weak by the strong. Robbery by violence. Dishonesty among those in places of power, where only the honest and the kind should sit." He dropped the paper. "I shall not perform the experiment just now, Dr. Gondor. Perhaps I shall never perform it."

He rose from his seat in a manner almost regal, and asked Carewe to remain for lunch. The doctors rightly took this as a courteous dismissal, and made their farewells. Huil took up the telephone and ordered plenty of food for two; he had become fond of Terrestrial cooking as he found it.

"Huil," said Carewe, "you fear too much."

It was an accusation, but Huil did not

take offense. "I doubt, Carewe, if one can fear too much," he said, looking at his new friend with wise, bright eyes, vertical-pupilled like a cats. "What shall I do for you as a favor? What has been the greatest search of all your world's scientists?"

Carewe thought of Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus. "The universal alkahest, I suppose," he replied. "For health, long life, and most of all for the transmutation of base metals into gold."

"Gold?" repeated Huil. "Oh, yes, that element is your highest standard of value. Carewe, I like you. If I gave my attention to it, this alkahest would be easy to discover."

"But I don't want it," protested Carewe. "I don't think that rich men are happy. Not even all wise men are happy, though I'd take my chance."

Huil's enormous mouth curled into a delightful caricature of a grin. "I find you a good man, Carewe. If only all human beings were like you, helpful and kind and to be trusted."

He talked then, more than heretofore, about his home planet. His words were magic; Carewe was able to see a world rich and fair, with blue-green skies and a sun hooped about like Saturn, and large but healthy cities, fields and parks and the best of good people. Upon this world had descended a plague of invaders, and at this point Huil's descriptive powers failed.

"Your language will not call the things properly," he said. "I can speak of machines with many-jointed legs, each ridden by a jellylike entity that is as much part of the device as the bowels are part of one of your spiders." He gestured with many-fingered hands that trembled. "This sounds only grotesque. I cannot say how horrible the creatures are, how greedy they are to kill us and to take our lands and towns. We shudder." He suited the action to the word. "It is torture to know that they come

in their ships only from the next planet—as near to us as Venus is to you."

"Surely you will conquer them," protested Carewe, but Huil shook his head.

"For a man's lifetime we have held them in cheek; for a lifetime, or a little more, we shall continue to do so. Eventually they must triumph. We are fewer than they, and not fierce. But you—you men of this world—are fiercer even than they."

Carewe was shaken with the story of the machine-monsters and their sub-reptilian, greedy-cruel operators. "We'd be fierce enough to make hash of those invaders. Why don't you give us the new power of thought, Huil? Then we can build ships like yours, and an army of us sail back to help you."

"After the victory, what?" Huil demanded. "So much our superiors in size and power of brain, you would turn upon us. From our allies you would become our persecutors, worse than the machine-riding monsters."

"No!" Carewe cried, shocked at the idea. "Huil, we would never do that to you."

"It is right that you think well of your own race," said Huil kindly, "and I have already wished that every man of Earth was as good as yourself. But here, look."

AGAIN he picked up the paper and held it out to his friend. From the front page glared the pictured face of a dictator, arrogant, iron-mouthed, glitter-eyed.

"He knows too much already," said Huil drily.

"You are certain," Carewe recapitulated, "that the full power of the brain cannot be given to one Terrestrial or a few—but to all?"

"I am certain," Huil assured it. "So it was long ago on my world, when a great and inspired leader evolved the secret. In communicating it to his dis-

ciples, he found that all his people, and those beyond his nation, knew immediately the awakening and the knowledge. I say again, it would be like a broadcasting of a radio message by one of your Terrestrial stations. Every brain would be a receiving set, tuned to the proper wave-length; each would be touched to music, to eloquence—or to sinister menace.”

He spoke sadly, and Carewe put out a hand to touch the Other-Man's tight sleeve. “I'm sorry,” he said honestly. “Sorry that you find no profit in your search for friends and allies.”

Huil then smiled again with his great gash of a mouth. “Perhaps, Carewe, we shall find what we are looking for in some other system,” he said. “We must depart soon. Once more, Carewe, I do not include you in my condemnation of your race as a selfish, dangerous breed.”

“If one of us is worth friendship, we all are,” pleaded Carewe. “I say that man is kind, normally. If the sleeping brain awoke, the new cells would know greater kindness still.”

Huil's eyes strayed toward the newspaper, with the harsh, proud face still staring from it. Carewe made one last attempt.

“He seems selfish, I grant; but his selfishness is so small a part of himself, faultily developed. Were he made wise and powerful by you, that evil would be weak and small beside the great new kindness.”

“If you could prove that!” cried Huil wistfully.

“Prove it yourself—with your superior wisdom—”

But they were interrupted by the arrival of the lunch. Both ate heartily but thoughtfully. Some time later in the afternoon, Huil asked for a taxi and went to the airport, where he and his associates conferred for some hours inside their ship.

RETURNING to Wichita, in the evening, Huil asked to see Dr. Gondor and the other scientists, also a representative of the governor. Eight persons gathered in his drawing room. Carewe attended the meeting, by Huil's special invitation.

“My companions and I must leave Earth tomorrow at midnight,” Huil addressed the group. “Perhaps the day afterward—no later.”

Gondor, as self-appointed spokesman, expressed rather gruffly his regret that Huil had not found the sort of thing he had hoped for upon Earth.

“There are other planets and systems,” replied Huil, “and, I dare say, at least one other race similar to yours and to mine. You, gentlemen, have also been disappointed. I refer to the fact that I am departing without having given you and your race the new mental powers we discussed.”

The scientists and professors nodded dolefully in admission of this statement.

“Perhaps I can modify that disappointment a little,” Huil went on, “by telling you the small part of the truth which I have so far withheld.”

“Withheld?” repeated Dr. Gondor sharply, and there was a general upward toss of heads as interest captured every attention there. Huil bowed slightly, as if in gratitude, and continued:

“When first I considered waking the race of this world to full brain power, I refrained from discussing one aspect of the process.” He cleared his throat with a deep rumble, rather like Dr. Gondor. “Gentlemen, if I should transfer this new ability and wakefulness to you, a single mind would serve as vehicle. That single mind would bear the entire impact of my hypnotic transference, spreading it to others. That mind would crack. Its owner would die.” He shut up his great mouth with a snap.

There was silence, for several moments. Then Dr. Gondor volunteered the information that he had guessed as much.

"You can see for yourselves why I did not tell you this before," Huil wound up. "None of you would want to die for something he will never profit by."

Carewe rose to his feet. "If you will reconsider," he said between dry lips, "I'll volunteer as the subject—I'll die for this gift to humanity."

Huil's eyes smiled. "You have become my good friend, Carewe. If I am to shock anyone to death, I would prefer that it be someone for whom I have less affection."

"Well, I'm not exactly your close friend," spoke up Dr. Gondor gruffly. "Why not take me as the subject? I was never afraid to die for science, or for humanity."

Huil lifted his many-fingered hand in protest. "Wait, wait. I did not say that I would do this thing. On the contrary, I only explained this necessity for death because I had definitely decided against performing the experiment."

With that, he concluded the meeting, and Carewe went home alone.

In the early morning he read the *Wichita Eagle*. There was more than Huil's statement to make news:

GOVERNOR OFFERS LIFE FOR HUMANITY

Thus the eight-column banner, in big, black type. Underneath was an interview with Governor Carnot at Topeka.

"I am the principal public servant of this state," Carnot had said. "If the chief of the Other-People is considering a gift of new mental powers to the world, to be achieved through the sacrifice of a single person, I would cheerfully be that person."

Under this was published a formal statement by Dr. Gondor's colleagues. They strongly urged Huil to agree to wakening Earth's brains, and offered themselves as possible subjects.

HURRYING downtown in the forenoon, Carewe found Huil alone in his suite at the hotel. The sojourner from a far world was opening envelope after envelope from a stack of special delivery letters and telegrams on his table.

"Help me with this deluge of correspondence," Huil greeted Carewe. "Look here, what do you think of this?"

It was a special delivery from Lansing, where the Kansas State Penitentiary is located. Scribbled crudely on coarse, blue-ruled paper, it read:

Dere mr Huil if you nede a Man
to dye for yor esprement wil state
that am glad to oblidge. I am up
hear at the big house duing a life
stretch but guess i wood welcome
a chanst to pay my dett to socity
by dyeing for this caus pleas ad-
vice when you want me

sincerely yours

HARRY VEDDER

"Well?" said Carewe. "He's a convict, a law-breaker. Probably he's committed murder, if he's serving a life sentence. Yet, is this the selfishness which you say rules all men?"

"He is sick of life in a prison," replied Huil. "He is glad to lay it down."

"I do not grant that it is so," murmured Carewe, "but, even if it were—look at what I have just opened."

It was from one Paul Sheppley, a student at the Municipal University of Wichita:

In case you need a subject to receive the brain-awakening wave,

and die in the receiving, I freely volunteer. I do not seek for any reward, except the obvious betterment that will come to the human race. This note may be taken as a pledge that no responsibility will be charged to anyone but myself.

"I happen to know that young man," said Carewe. "All this town knows him. He's a football star, an honor student, admired, healthy, with a fine future awaiting him. Not much chance that he is looking for death. Yet he will face it, as a service to his fellow-men."

Huil fiddled absent-mindedly with a great sheaf of envelopes. Carewe had never before seen him so detached and dreamy. When he spoke, it was with an almost sly persuasiveness:

"This does not mean that every man in the world is offering to die for his people."

"No, but many are offering," returned Carewe at once. "This, mind you, is a single morning's mail—from only a few miles around, where people have read the late editions of the papers last night. What will you receive tomorrow, Huil? And the next day? And the following week, if you extend your stay so far?"

Huil gazed at him long and searchingly, and no expression modified that broad, shallow-browed countenance. Carewe continued:

"It's high time, my friend, that I took the strongest exception to your arbitrary condemnation of my race. We men of Earth have advanced because we help each other; we shall advance to greater things still because we shall continue to help each other. We shall discover for ourselves the boon you withhold, or get along without it. Meanwhile, I am sorry for you and your mistrust."

Huil smiled, and set his hand on Carewe's shoulder. "Don't quarrel," he

pleaded. "Have you your car at hand? Because I'd like to drive somewhere, some pleasant spot where we can relax for a few moments."

"Of course, if you like," said Carewe, his heat departing from him at once. "My car's parked near the entrance of the hotel." He started for the door. "We can go to Riverside Park."

They went.

Riverside Park, located almost at the center of the city of Wichita, is tucked into a great bend of the Little Arkansas River, a carefully tended tract of sward and green trees. At this time in the morning it was almost deserted. Leaving the car on Nims Avenue, near the little zoological garden, the two friends walked a short distance along a graveled path. Huil called a halt, and they faced each other on a grass-covered level between a pair of Civil War cannon and a little clump of cedars.

"You offered to die as the martyr to this shocking of all Terrestrial humanity's brains into full wakening," he reminded Carewe weightily.

Carewe's face lighted up. "Then you are relenting?" he almost shouted. "You will waken our minds?"

"Yes," said Huil. "Today, at once. You will be the subject?"

"Of course I will," nodded Carewe, then looked sober for a moment. "I don't quite know how to break the news to my wife, but—"

"There will be no time for that," broke in Huil hastily. "I shall put the psychological machinery into action this moment."

"Can I do not have an hour?" asked Carewe, but the frog-head shook emphatically.

"Not a minute, Carewe. See, your desire to take leave of your wife, to set your affairs in order, is but a refinement of selfishness. It cannot be. If you intend to accept, do so at once, be-

fore I change my mind again."

Carewe swallowed hard, but his voice was absolutely steady as he replied: "Very good. Begin. I am ready now."

He drew himself up and met Huil's penetrating gaze.

"I need not ask you to banish fear from your heart," said Huil gently. "Only look into my eyes. Do not blink." He lifted a hand and drew it slowly across Carewe's line of vision. The lemon-colored palm and its fringe of narrow fingers seemed to float there of itself, with no supporting wrist or arm. It blurred, became a spot of light. "Relax your brain," Huil was saying, from farther off. "Relax, at this same time let the atoms of it waken . . . let each atom attune itself to mine—"

Carewe wondered, most serenely, if he should die before his mind was touched to full activity. Then he wondered how the power would be transferred throughout the world to other men . . . then, suddenly he knew; Huil had been right, and Carewe saw how he had been right . . . yes, it was like a master broadcast to every brain-radio.

THOUGHTS were real, as real and powerful as rays of light, as waves of sound. Being able to marshal and direct those thoughts was like seeing endlessly, hearing infinitely. Problems were no longer problems. That baffling thing Huil had said, about outdistancing light by cutting arcs of space—why, it was simple, elemental. He, Carewe, knew how it could be improved upon. Yes, and how to build a space-ship to effect it. As for the world, and the world's peoples at large. . . .

He seemed to hold the world between his hands. He could see it all, and at the same time no single tiny item was shrunk away from his vision. He was aware of cities, nations, rulers, and

they were no longer as they had been. They knew the truth, and the truth made them free. They were kind, understanding. They were happy.

But what was happening to him? Where was he?

He realized that he still stood on the little patch of sward in Riverside Park, before the mute muzzles of the two old cannon. Huil faced him, and his frog-mouth was smiling.

"I'm not dead," said Carewe, perplexed.

"You were never even in danger," Huil told him. "Did I not try to prove your race selfish? . . . and have I not failed?"

"I see now," Carewe smiled back. "You tried to frighten us."

"Instead of which you almost frightened me, with your desire to die helpfully. And you know all wonderful things now. Perhaps they are no longer wonders."

"They are the more wonderful for the knowledge of them," Carewe said. He spread his arms, as a child might, in pure joy. "See how green the grass is, how blue the sky! And the sunlight—and the cedar trees yonder—"

"Do not forget," put in Huil, "that you are to help my people against their enemies."

"I have not forgotten," Carewe assured him.

The back of Carewe's awakened mind had been full of the problem. As in a drama he saw the rush upon Huil's world of those machine-driving monsters, so loathsome, so cruel—and so blundering. He knew, already, their mistakes, and how those mistakes could be built into their downfall.

"We shall start building a space-fleet this very morning," he said to Huil. "Your enemies shall be swept out of the universe."

The End

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

MARVEL'S NEW SENSATIONAL SCIENCE-FICTION DEPARTMENT

by RAY CUMMINGS

Proof that the basic ultimate substance is—nothing! . . . Mechanical invisibility is coming! . . . Have you tried to kill yourself recently? . . . Do you see things as they really are?

The Man Who Discovered Nothing

YOU are privileged to meet one of the greatest physicists of the age. He has recently discovered the Ultimate Substance—the basic “Thing” out of which all the Universe is created.

more powerful microscopes, and they discovered other things still smaller. On the platform now is this newest instrument, which delves visually, down into the very Infinity of Smallness.

The physicist says, “I am taking a single tiny grain of gold; I will show you of what it is made.”

The tubelights are extinguished. In



The newscasters call him “The Discoverer of Nothing.” In one sense, that is literally true. But in the other, his feat is monumental.

He stands now on the little platform, addressing a group of his fellow scientists. He says, “Our discovery was made by pure deductive theory. But today, with this electro-ultramicroscope, we are enabled to show you the actual smallest Entity in the Universe.”

When your father was a boy, they called the smallest thing of all—the Atom. But then they constructed other,

the darkness, from the sterile glass slide of the gigantic electro-microscope, a tiny beam of white light threads its way through the prisms, lenses and magnifying vacuum-tubes and ends in a ten-foot white circle of light on the silver screen behind and above the platform. A giant, blurred yellow image is there. The image clarifies into a great shaggy golden mountain. . . . Then, with greater magnification, you seem to be peering into a single golden grotto of that giant honeycombed mountain. There is a steady magnification now.

The grotto rapidly expands to a vast abyss with giant vague yellow globes pushing and surging one against the other throughout all the illimitable black-gold distance.

The molecules of gold. . . . Then only one of them is here. It grows gigantic until you see its apparant solidity expand into a yellow-sheen of emptiness; filled with darting yellow globules. The golden atoms! The smallest thing which still is gold. They flash in aimless bustling paths—colliding, caroming from one collision to another. . . .

Then the image clings to one flashing atom. And again, as the atom visually expands, you see its solidity opening into an abyss of emptiness, with tiny distant glowing things like whirling points of light. Protons, electrons—many names have been given them. Particles of disembodied electricity—that too, never meant very much.

Tiny things? Why, what you are seeing now seems a giant vista of Interstellar Space — distant nebulae, suns, planets—a myriad separate universes, with illimitable empty distance between them.

Again the microscopic image magnifies. Just one of these glowing worlds now expands to fill all the big silver screen.

The physicist is saying, "And this is the Ultimate Entity—the basic thing out of which you and I, our bodies, our houses, our Earth and all the Stars, are built."

You stare at the magnified image of that Basic Thing. A gigantic whirling, rotating cyclone? A dim blur of something gigantic, rotating upon itself with infinite speed?

And the physicist is saying, "This thing is creating its visibility, its ponderability—its very existence is created solely by its movement. It is, in actuality, a vortex of Nothingness!"

I am *not* fantastic!

Our own bodies, our houses, our Earth and all the stars are built of stuff no more substantial than Nothingness in rapid motion! Shakespeare said, "We are such stuff as dreams are made of—" And physicists now are coming to agree with him. The most recent discoveries of the electrical composition of matter indicate that the basic, Ultimate Substance actually is only a vortex of Nothingness!

"I Am Invisible!"

YOU sit close to the little platform, tensely watching this demonstration of the new mechanical invisibility, recently perfected by Dr. Charles Martel. The great scientist himself is here; and he says now to the small audience of fellow scientists:

"Conjurers always used to use a handsome young woman for their demonstrations, so I think I shall do the same." He is smiling. He says, "But I do assure you that I am no conjurer."

The girl stands on a small dais. She is dressed in a blue-white tunic cloak. It drapes from the top of her head to the ground. It is long-sleeved and gloved. Close behind her is a back-ground screen of black and white checkerboard.

The physicist has two intricate pieces of electrical mechanism here to one side of the platform. From one of them he connects a tiny wire to the girl's blue drape. He says:

"A color is 'red' because it absorbs from the light-rays of the Sun all the other colors of the spectrum and leaves only red to be reflected from it to the eye. 'Black' is the absorption of all colors. And color is dependent upon vibratory motion. It can be likened to a range of radio wave-lengths."

He gestures from his apparatus to the

girl. "Her cloak is a metal woven fabric. I am going to de-electronize it—exhaust from it, its normal electric content. The cloak now will absorb all light-rays. You see that it becomes black."

Black indeed. A queerly true black—a real absence of light-ray reflection—a "nothingness to see." In effect, the cloak is invisible. But the girl is not invisible. She is merely garbed in a black cloak.

The scientist says, "That checkerboard background is obscured by her solidity, and so your eye constructs her outlines. But now I will throw a magnetic field around her—" He contacts a switch of his ray-projector, and its invisible magnetic current envelops the girl.

Amazing illusion! You see the entire checkerboard background now, as though the girl were not standing in front of it! All of her has vanished; there is only her voice coming out of empty air, saying, "I am invisible!"

To my knowledge, mechanical invisibility such as this, has not yet been accomplished, now in 1941. But color absorption can be achieved. And how, you ask, can one possibly see around a solid object which is obscured behind it? Well, nature does that herself, if you build a certain type of magnetic field. Light-rays, passing through a magnetic field, bend around a solid object, so that you can see what is behind it. Albert Einstein was the first to announce this natural law, and upon its truth or falsity, the whole fabric of the Einstein Theory of Relativity was woven. And not many years ago, an eclipse of the Sun showed Stars which actually were behind the Sun.

Mechanical invisibility is coming. You and I have a fairly good chance of witnessing an invisible man stalking a city street in broad daylight. You'll

only know he is there when he bumps into you!

The Suicide Disease

THE young man is sullen, resentful and obviously frightened as he sits staring at the Director of Public Health. You draw back into the recess where your friend the Director has placed you. A shaft of sunlight comes through the big glassite windows of the Director's office. It strikes a shimmering pattern on the soft blue floor rug; it lights the kindly face of the grey-haired physician as he stands sympathetically regarding this very sick young man whom he has ordered here.

"I don't see why you pry into my private affairs," the young man says resentfully. "My health is all right—"

"But it isn't," the Director says gently. "You tried to kill yourself yesterday. You are suffering from a well-recognized disease. It is a disorder of your personality. You got it from psychologic disturbance and conflict—from social and environmental difficulties."

The Director is smiling. He sits beside the young man and puts a hand on his shoulder. "Social and environmental difficulties," he repeats. "You call them your personal troubles—"

"God knows I've got them," the young man murmurs.

"Of course you have. And they have given you a personality disorder. Here in this hospital, a lot of people have pneumonia—and some have diseases that are worse. Yours, you may thank God, is much more simple."

The young man stares. "My disease?"

"Of course." Then the Director adds abruptly, "You know that I have every resource of modern science here at my

command for the curing of disease?"

"Yes," the young man admits.

"Well, I can start curing your disease just as soon as you realize you've got it. Will you give me three months?"

In the silence you stare breathlessly from your sheltered recess. The young man, nervously shifting in his chair, has brought his face suddenly into the sunlight. Something that was in his eyes is gone. And something has come: the light of Hope. . . .

"God knows," he murmurs, "I want to be cured."

Does this seem to you only a futuristic inspirational picture? After an exhaustive study of the problem of suicide, Dr. Merill Moore of Harvard declared that it is an important disease—a personality disorder—a disease that should be recognized and treated as such.

See Things As They Really Are

YOUR fiancé says, "The woods are beautiful tonight. Shall we take a walk? The trees are glowing more than usual. They look all excited—let's go out and watch them."

This girl you are going to marry is a realist. She likes to see things as they really are. It is a bright moonlight night; just an average summer night. Her little home is set at the bottom of a hill, in a wooded valley. She leads you through the garden gate, and along a path that runs back into the deep woods, beside a purling little stream.

The moonlight is gone now; it can hardly filter down through the thick interlocking leafy branches overhead. You find that she was right. The woods tonight are a fairyland of eerie red glow. Ghostly trees, shining with a red fluorescence. Every leaf is quivering with it. Crimson light, like blood.



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It paints your companion's slim figure with a weird, ghostly sheen so that she seems a little phantom girl here beside you.

And the light from the trees stains the purling brook so that its babbling water is like glowing blood. That might make you shudder. Blood like crimson fire, babbling here among the stones.

Crimson, shining forest. Your fiancé, so superbly realistic that she has no imagination at all, says enthusiastically.

"Isn't it beautiful? Look how the leaves seem afraid of us!"

She bends down over a little leafy bush. Its leaves, glowing with the blood-red sheen, flash with a new intensity. They seem to quiver with pulsating red light as she blows her breath upon them. Leaves that are frightened, alive with terror at the feel of her breath!

Ghostly little forest, stained with its own blood-light. You wander on; vaguely you shudder, and though you don't say so, you are glad when at last the woodland path has emerged, and again you are in normal earthly moonlight.

Would you say that was an imaginative trip into a forest on another planet? Not at all. It's here on earth. Any forest. Any night. You can try it tonight, if you like. How to do it, and what you would see was explained the other day by Dr. E. D. McAlister and Dr. Jack Myers, of the Smithsonian Institute, in Washington. Trees, so these scientists explained, are the largest organisms which capture and convert sunshine. They may seem quiescent, but there is intense chemical activity within them. And they give off radiation in the form of heat waves.

To see the weird, ghostly red glow which leaves radiate in the form of

heat waves, all you would need would be glasses to filter out the green light reflected from the surface of the leaves—a light much stronger than the radiation from within. And you would see, also, that changes in the chemical composition of the atmosphere would cause sudden bursts of intensity of the plants' weird radiation. Breathe upon a leaf. You would see it flash with a quivering, intensified redness. Eerie, pulsating crimson glow under your breath. Why? Because the carbon dioxide you exhale stimulates it into sudden intensified, chemical activity!

Amazing, this world in which we live! The truth is, with our limited senses, we see, hear, feel and smell only an infinitely tiny fraction of what really exists. And suppose, suddenly, that we could be made aware of everything at once? We would go mad in the chaos. There is no doubt of that.

The End

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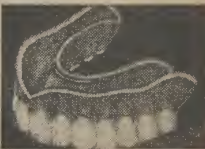
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